IN BLESSED CYRUS

Laura E. Richards

Helen B. Lincoln

Books By Laura E. Richards

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(With Maud Howe Elliott)

209 E

LINA AND ZEPHINE CAME TOGETHER

IN BLESSED CYRUS

BY

LAURA E. RICHARDS

AUTHOR OF "A DAUGHTER OF JEHU," "PIPPIN," "MRS. TREE," "MRS. TREE'S WILL," ETC.

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TO

J. C. R.

WITH MUCH LOVE

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	Prologue	1
I	Newcomers in Cyrus	5
II	Quintessence of Cyrus	14
III	The New Neighbors	35
IV	Enter Timothy Tenterden	44
V	The Chanters	60
VI	Lila Laughter	74
VII	A Quiet Hour	85
VIII	"A Little More Than Kin and Less Than Kind"	94
IX	At Gaylord's	107
X	Neighborly	116
XI	Preliminaries: and Snuff	127
XII	The Event of the Season	144
XIII	Mother and Son	157
XIV	The Course of True Love	165
XV	Quintessential	177
XVI	The Mallow House	191
XVII	Croesus Dolorusus	201
XVIII	Concerning Twins	217
XIX	"Love that Hath Us in the Net"	229
XX	"From Plague, Pestilence and Famine"	238
XXI	The Course of Things	260
XXII	Billy Speaks	277
XXIII	A Coming-Out Party	288
XXIV	The Minister's Saturday	296

IN BLESSED CYRUS

PROLOGUE

I CALL Cyrus blessed, because it is the happiest place I know: the fullest of that kindly, neighborly spirit of good will which may, I think, be called the American spirit. (When we are at home! I have heard that we are less pleasant abroad.) I visit Cyrus at most once in two or three years; I do not actually need to visit it at all to keep it alive in my memory. I have described elsewhere* the quaint, pleasant village which is content to be a village, with no longings (save in one or two over-eager breasts) for "city privileges"; its Common, with the churches and houses clustering round it, facing each other with friendly eyes on three sides, and blandly confronted on the fourth by the ample frontage of the Mallow House; its street under the hill with the familiar shops, so unlike shops in other places. The Crewel Shop, where Mr. Jason and Mr. Josiah Jebus kept their happy partnership, twins in spirit, though not in fact, the one dispensing all articles necessary for fancy work, the other exemplifying their use in the exquisite embroideries which form the favorite adornment of all proper Cyrus parlors: the book store where dear old Mr. Bygood, in company with his daughters, Miss Almeria

*In "A Daughter of Jehu."

and Miss Egeria, welcomed Cyrus with gentle urbanity and supplied it with books and stationery: Abram Hanks's dingy dry goods store, which seemed to contain principally flannel, but could grudgingly produce, when desired, a variety of necessary articles: and the brightest ornament of the Street, Mr. Ivory Cheeseman's candy kitchen and store, the happy second home of all good children and some naughty ones: all these, I say, are present with me always. I can go into Bygood's at any moment, sure of my welcome and my happy half hour; I can hear Mr. Cheeseman's shop bell tinkle as I open the door, and see his brown wrinkled face, like that of a wise monkey, with its thick cap of white hair, peering out from the back shop; can smell, too, the warm fragrance of boiling molasses or chocolate.

In the days of which I am now to write, there were various changes in Cyrus Street, but my thoughts are oftenest of the old time when Kitty Ross and I played about there, flitting like butterflies from one friendly interior to another; Kitty Ross, dearest of girls, the Star of Cyrus, as we used to call her; whom Tom Lee wooed and won and wedded, all to an ancient dancing tune, as has elsewhere been told.* We went oftenest to Cheeseman's, as a matter of course; yet it seems to me that some part of every day was spent at Bygood's. We worshiped at the dual shrine of the Misses Bygood: Miss Almeria, handsome and stately, the chief divinity of Cyrus these many years; Miss Egeria, gentlest and timidest of women; both full of kind and friendly courtesies, with—when need was—a word of admonition to the Young.

* In "A Daughter of Jehu."

"Kitty, my love, you have raised your skirt higher than you are aware of. I can see your stocking!"

"Mary, dear child, shoulders back, please! Dear Mamma would not wish you to walk with a poke. Ten minutes daily exercise in your room with a book on your head will counteract the tendency, I am convinced."

They cared for our Tone as well as our *tenue,* dear Miss Bygoods! Shall we ever forget the day when, rummaging among the books of the little Circulating Library, we found "Guy Livingston," in a dim corner, behind a row of tall volumes, the works of Miss Julia Pardoe? We had been plunged in it for quite ten minutes when Miss Almeria, coming from the back shop, found us curled up on the step ladder, our heads together, breathless and spellbound.

"Guy, exerting the full force of his arms, shook himself clear, and grasping a brass candlestick within his reach, struck the executioner straight——"

"Children! what have you there?"

On our exclaiming that we had found the most wonderful book, all hidden away behind Miss Pardoe, she took the volume from us with the first look of real displeasure we had ever seen on her kind face.

"You have done wrong!" she said severely. "The volume was placed there intentionally. It is an Unsuitable Work!"

I can see her now, her fine figure drawn to its full height, her dark blue eyes flashing, every line of her classic face, every ripple even of her jet-black hair, conveying Disapproval: it was a dreadful moment. I own a copy of "Guy Livingston" now, and display it openly to envious contemporaries, but I never open

the book without seeing Miss Almeria towering over me, without hearing the fateful words: "an Unsuitable Work!"

We were sure to meet friends at Bygood's, old and young: Mr. Very Jordano, the poetic and Italianesque editor of the *Cyrus Centinel;* Mr. Marshall Mallow, the rosy, beaming landlord of the Mallow House. There was Judge Peters, too, tall, dignified and kindly, and his handsome wife, she that was Johanna Ross; the minister, Mr. Chanter, and his friendly, cheery family; Squire Quint and his sister, Miss Polly, and many more. I am not writing a directory. All this good company, I say, I could have for the asking, in thought; yet every few years it seemed necessary to go and shake hands with them all, and see the kindly look in their eyes and hear them ask when I was coming home to live. A visit to Cyrus was like the giant's touch of Mother Earth, and always set me up again in mind and body.

CHAPTER I

NEWCOMERS IN CYRUS

AT the time of which I am now to write, there had been various changes in Cyrus society. The Quints had come back from abroad. [They went once in ten years, to purchase articles for the Collections; it was a Quintessential habit.] Madam Flynt and Miss Croly had gone to Florida for the Winter. And Mr. and Mrs. Augustine Tooth had come to live in Cyrus.

The last incident must be related somewhat in detail, since if these two worthy people had continued to abide in Tupham, this story would never have been written.

Tupham is the next village to Cyrus, looking northward: a sunny, sleepy little place, beside which Cyrus is a bustling metropolis, and Tinkham (*horresco referens!*) a Vulgar Mart. The expression is Miss Almeria Bygood's.

Mr. Tooth had been for many years the Tupham druggist. His wife was a Jebus, a cousin of the Twins; a timid, depressed little woman, whose bonnet (or "front," as the case might be) was always on one side, and who sidled in her walk, like an amiable crab in petticoats. Her passion was frugality: the one sharp-tongued woman in kindly Tupham was wont to say that Emmeline Tooth would "skin an egg three times and then set the shell to hatch"—a phrase more expressive than intelligible. Mr. Tooth, on the

other hand, had secret leanings toward luxury, especially in the line of what he delighted to call "my Profession, sir!" He meekly wore the same coat year after year; it was clean, it was whole; Mrs. Tooth saw to that, brushing and patching indefatigably; but she never knew what he paid for the marble mortar and pestle which—in those days—represented the flowering of his simple life.

On this worthy couple, living in their three little rooms over the shop, smiling Fate dropped one day a bombshell. An uncle died in California; an uncle unknown, unmarried, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, to say nothing of those of frugality; died, and left his whole fortune to his next of kin, "my nephew, Augustine Tooth, of Tupham, Maine, if he is alive and respectable."

"If!" Judge Peters, reading this item aloud, glanced over his spectacles at Mr. Tooth, sitting opposite him in the office chair; at the gentle face (a little like that of the White Knight), the light brown eyes, slightly prominent and given to blinking in a strong light; the pale chestnut hair, brushed smoothly over the high forehead. ("Augustine has a noble brow!" Mrs. Tooth always said, and no one contradicted her.) "You are certainly respectable!" was Judge Peters' inward comment; "as to your being alive, that remains to be seen."

He resumed the reading of the document in his hand; on reaching the end, he folded it carefully and returned it with a little bow to Mr. Tooth, who sat on the edge of his chair, blinking nervously.

"I congratulate you, sir!" he said. "You are a rich man."

There was a shade of austerity in the Judge's tone. We do not think specially well of riches in Cyrus. No true Cyrusian (it is only Tinkham that calls us Cyrustics, and as Tom Lee says, "Tinkham would!") is actually rich. We are "comfortable," "very well off," and in a few cases, that of Madam Flynt for example, or Judge Peters himself, "amply provided for"; but none of us are rich. And anyhow we do not talk of such matters. "They are for the office," Miss Almeria used to say, "or the place of business; not for the social circle!"

Mr. Augustine Tooth received the Judge's pronunciamento with a nervous start. "It—is true, then?" he asked, with a catch in his voice. "You—regard the document as genuine?"

"Undoubtedly! The will is in correct form, and duly witnessed; the firm is one of high standing. There can be no doubt of the matter; you are a rich man, Mr. Tooth!"

Mr. Tooth rose abruptly and went to the window. "It is likely to rain!" he said. "The country is very dry." He paused, blinking at the opposite windows: then—"I have never in my life had ten dollars that I was free to spend!" he said simply.

The Judge coughed delicately, and regarded his polished fingernails. He had spent ten times ten dollars the day before for a choice edition of the Pandects: of course that was in a semi-professional way——

"I do not know what to do!" Mr. Tooth went on. "I am—appalled, sir! A million dollars! What—what could a person *do* with a million dollars? If it

was not too much, sir, I should beg for your kind assistance. I am—I repeat—appalled!"

His face as he turned round was so piteous that the Judge's kind heart smote him for the momentary repulsion he had felt. After all, it was not the poor man's fault!

"Sit down! sit down!" he said kindly. "I shall be glad to give you any assistance in my power, Mr. Tooth. We shall have no difficulty in arranging a *modus vivendi,* I fancy."

Proceeding cautiously and skilfully, the Judge in ten minutes had plucked out the heart of Mr. Tooth's mystery—only it was no mystery at all! Walking up and down the office, with steps growing more and more agitated, the Inheritor unfolded in broken sentences the dream of his life. The Perfect Pharmacy! the temple to which physicians, surgeons, public, might all repair, with perfect confidence of finding faultless service and efficient help. "My Profession, sir," had not hitherto met with suitable recognition: Mr. Tooth would raise it to the height where—in his humble opinion—it properly belonged.

Judge Peters listened attentively, with an occasional murmur of sympathy or appreciation. Would Mr. Tooth, he asked, propose to set up this—a—ideal pharmacy—in Tupham? The field, though doubtless excellent, was limited.

Mr. Tooth paused in his walk and threw his hands abroad with a gesture of dismissal.

"Tupham is my birthplace, sir, and I love it; but it is *no* field for such an enterprise as I propose. I had thought—I had wished—in short, Cyrus would be the ideal spot, in my opinion."

Judge Peters looked benign: the glory of Cyrus was always near his heart. This, he observed, was a somewhat remarkable coincidence. He had some reason to think—in fact, he might say that he believed—that his venerable and esteemed fellow townsman, Mr. Stacey Budge, contemplated retiring from business in the not far distant future. Mr. Budge was advanced in years and felt the need of rest. It might be possible—the Judge would with pleasure undertake to ascertain——

Mr. Tooth broke out in incoherent expressions of gratitude, which the Judge received with sedate composure, listening with his bodily ears, while those of his mind resounded with the cries of Mr. Stacey Budge, the present apothecary of Cyrus.

"By jing, Jedge, if I don't git out of this pooty quick, there'll be nothin' left of me to *git!* The spasms ketches me something awful, sir; I like t'ha' passed away last night. You find somebody, won't you, Jedge?"

"I think," he said, "that—in point of fact, there is little doubt about the matter. You may regard it, sir, as practically settled; practically, you observe! Of course, nothing positive can be said at present. Now—as to the question of residence, Mr. Tooth!"

A spark crept into the Judge's eyes. The man of business was awake and alert. "You would hardly, I presume, continue to reside—a——"

With a debonair wave of the hand the Judge contrived to demonstrate the unsuitability of the three small rooms over the to-be-discarded drug store to present conditions. Mr. Tooth responded with a gesture of contemptuous dismissal.

"Certainly not!" he said. "I should wish to make my home as near as possible to my place of business. I have always, if I may say so, admired greatly the Society of Cyrus. Tupham has no society to speak of. Tinkham, though larger, and—in commercial matters—prosperous—is——" Similar gestures from both gentlemen annihilated Tinkham.

"Precisely!" the Judge said. "Quite so! There is a most desirable residence on the outskirts of Cyrus, which, it strikes me, might be the very thing to—eh? I allude to the Gaylord Estate."

Mr. Tooth blinked and gasped. "The Gaylord Estate! Would it be possible—? I have always admired that estate more than any other I have ever seen, sir. My—my wildest dreams never carried me so far as that. Would there be any possibility of my—in short, obtaining it?"

The Judge thought there was a possibility; he would go so far as to say a probability. He would look into the matter.

Considering that he had been trying for three years to find a purchaser for the Gaylord Estate, the Judge did not have to look far, or long. The matter was soon concluded. The great house, closed and shuttered these many years, with its tall firs clustering round it, and its neglected gardens and orchards; the little shop in the street, with its fly-specked bottles, its dilapidated soda-water fountain, its good will and fixtures, all became the property of "our former neighbor, and whom we are pleased and proud to extend the right hand of fellowship as a denizen of Cyrus (thus Mr. Jordano, a trifle hurried over his Personal Column), Mr. Augustine Tooth."

Certainly no one could say that Mr. Tooth lacked energy. His first efforts were devoted to the renovation of the pharmacy. Cyrus soon found that it must not say "potticary shop" any more; and indeed no one would have ventured to do so, when from the dust and decrepitude of "Budge's" arose, little by little, the phœnix of the Perfect Pharmacy.

"All of jasper, then!" Browning's bishop orders his tomb. It is improbable that Mr. Tooth ever heard of either bishop or tomb, but he held like views about his shop, sharing also the bishop's belief that "there's plenty jasper somewhere in the world!" Panels of jasper lined the walls, set in white enamel mouldings. A solid slab of jasper formed the counter; soda fountain, tobacco jars, pestle and mortar, all shone in the same delicate, translucent tints. Mrs. Sharpe inclined to think this use of jasper profane, if not blasphemous. She went so far as to consult the Reverend Timothy Chanter on the propriety of patronizing a store where sacred things were used "as if they was common rock." "A jasper and a sardine stone, you know, Mr. Chanter; it don't seem hardly right, does it? I know *I* never have sardines in my home; never!"

The Reverend Timothy Chanter looked grave, but was quite sure no profanity was intended. Mr. Tooth would be the last man, etc., etc.

"And how does Mrs. Tooth take it?" people asked.

Well, there! they were told. Poor Emmeline! It was an Earthquake Shock to her. Tupham neighbors, making a "run-in" the day the great news came out, found her sitting on the floor, amid the ruins of her life. The bureau drawers were all pulled out; chairs and tables were littered with the scanty ward-

robe of herself and her spouse, mingled with towels and pillowcases. The neighbors greeting her with breathless gratulations and wonderings, Mrs. Tooth had burst into tears, and declared her desire to pass away then and there.

"I don't want a fortune!" the poor lady cried. "I want my little home. I've lived here ever since I was married: if I'd have had twins, they'd have been born here. It's something awful!"

The poor soul wiped her eyes and gazed round on the ruin she had wrought.

"There!" she said; "just thinking of it has set me raving distracted. Look at them things! It'll cost twenty-five dollars to move all that stuff. And some of it ain't fit to move!" she added. "That armchair hasn't got but three legs; I put an ottoman under it and that drape over it and it looks real good where it stands, but take and rack it over the road to Cyrus and 'twill perish on the way. I tell you so, and I've told Gustine Tooth, but it's my belief that man is beside himself. There! he don't know whether he is himself or the King of Europe! That lounge was Father's. He always laid on it every evening; 'twas he wore out the haircloth and jammed the springs down, and how do you think 'twill look cocked up in that big mournful mansion? Gaylord's always gave me the creeps ever since I can remember, and to think I should ever have to live there is more than what it seems as if I could bear *and* live!"

Somehow or other, it was done. The forlorn bits of furniture, the pitiful ornaments and household goods were "racked over the road to Cyrus" and duly deposited in the wide, echoing rooms of the Gaylord

Mansion. (Cissy Sharpe met them on the way, and made merry for several days about the "Dental Display," but no one was disposed to share her merriment.) The callow youth who was henceforward to dispense drugs to Tupham moved into the three little rooms over the store, with his new-made wife, as Augustine and Emmeline had done twenty years before; and—to quote the *Centinel* once more—Cyrus opened its hospitable arms to receive "a pair as esteemed for their manifold virtues as illuminated by the aureate glow of unexpected but richly merited and none could say inappropriately bestowed Affluence."

CHAPTER II

QUINTESSENCE OF CYRUS

ALL the older people in Cyrus and some of the younger ones know the Quints; the Quintessence of Cyrus, as Johanna Ross named them in her young days, when she knew less than she came to know later, and was scornful of Cyrus and its ways. She also called them Quince Preserves, which Miss Almeria Bygood thought unfeeling. Mr. Mallow had a theory that Mr. Quint had once proposed to Madam Flynt, and that she had treated him "like the doormat under her feet, sir!"

"He's more like the scraper!" said Dr. Ross.

The Quint homestead stands at some distance from Cyrus Common, on the outskirts of the village. It is the oldest house in the neighborhood; there was no Cyrus Common when "Quaker Quint" took up his grant in early days, felled his timber and built his house facing the sunset, with Gibbet Hill rising green and steep behind it. He thought, good man, of the hill only as a protection from the north wind: he never dreamed that he would be hanged on its topmost spot, "as a pestilent heretick and a spreader of false doctrine," and that it would take its name from that murderous death of his.

"Thee will remember me!" said the old man to Sheriff Wibird, as the latter tied his hands roughly. "I cannot think the Lord will allow thee to prosper, Wilson!"

It was true that the Wibirds had dwindled from a strong race to a feeble folk, like the conies, as Tom Lee said.

The Quints, on the other hand, had prospered. The murdered Quaker left a son who stayed on in the homestead, married, and begat sons and daughters. The sons were strong, the daughters fair. Their names shine in Revolutionary annals: soldiers, sailors, jurists; Mistress Judith who married a Governor, Mistress Penelope who was so beautiful that she was requested to wear a veil at Meeting, because the young men could not attend to the sermon. All gone now! only these two left of the name, at least in our part of the country; Mr. Tertius Quint and his sister, Miss Hippolyta. The former, after a youth of wild adventure—he had fought with Garibaldi, sailed to every country possessing a seaboard, climbed mountains and shot tigers innumerable—had returned to the village and the house where he was born, and—"fossilized!" said Johanna Ross.

"No!" said her brother, the Doctor. "Crystallized, my dear! He is the first specimen in his own collection, and a singularly fine one."

Mr. Tertius Quint bore his parents a deep and lasting grudge for having, as he maintained, misnamed him. Quintus, he stoutly averred, was his rightful name.

"I was the fifth child, sir! The thing is monstrous. Because my maternal grandfather happened to be named Tertius—correctly, I may add—was that any reason for misnaming his descendant? If I had ten children—which God forbid!—do you think any human power would prevent me from naming the

tenth Decius—or Decimus, as might be preferred? If so, you little know me, sir; you little know me!"

In person, Mr. Quint was tall and spare, with an austere grace that was all his own. His bright, dark eyes, the winter-apple flush in his cheeks, above all his superb crown of wavy silver hair, made him a marked figure in Cyrus, or anywhere else for that matter. In habit, he was something of a recluse, and everything of a collector. Snuffboxes and first editions were the two passions of his later life. A curious combination; only it could hardly be called a combination, for the two collections were kept rigidly apart: snuffboxes in the parlor, on the left of the front door; books—naturally enough—in the library on the right. Miss Hippolyta was allowed certain rights in the parlor; by day, that is to say. She might sit there, because she was a Woman and a Weakling, sir, and liked to see people pass on the road; she might even receive visitors there, provided they did not "cackle loudly," and did not leave finger marks on the glass cases which held the snuffboxes. The evenings Miss Quint spent in her own delightful sitting room at the back of the house, whereof more hereafter.

In the library, however, the lady of the house was allowed no rights save that of entrance on call, as it were. Mr. Quint took care of the room himself: such care that no speck of dust was ever seen on its shining surfaces. His silk dusters, his brushes (I never quite believed that he combed the Turkey carpet, though some people maintained it), his polishes, lived in their own special cupboard, into which no woman might so much as peep. (As a matter of fact—but

never mind! We were naughty children, Kitty and I.)

On pleasant evenings, it often happened, that some friend and neighbor—Mr. Marshall Mallow it might be, or Mr. Very Jordano, or Judge Peters in his bachelor days, or Tom Lee in his married ones—thought it would be no more than neighborly to go and spend an hour with Squire Quint. Let us imagine the two first-named gentlemen starting together: it would be early in the evening, for Mr. Quint kept early hours. The two friends would stroll leisurely along the pleasant road, talking of village matters, till they came in sight of the house, humping its gambrel roof and pricking its sharp gables (yes, it had both! and a classical porch, too, round at the back somewhere. Generations of builders had tried their hand on the old house) under the green shoulder of Gibbet Hill. The gentlemen would here pause to reconnoiter. If a light were in the right-hand window, they would exchange glances.

"Gone to earth a'ready!" Mr. Mallow would say. "Now! now! why 'tain't eight o'clock yet! He's no call to burrow as early as this, what say? What I mean, 'tisn't sociabilious!"

"Our friend is a singular man-pan-pan!" Mr. Jordano would reply, in his own fashion of speech. "A character, sir! a character! We must respect the eccentricities of age. A pleasant evening for a stroll-toll-toll!" and the two friends would turn and amble slowly back toward the Common.

Mr. Mallow and Mr. Jordano were two of the worthies of Cyrus, and worthy indeed they were, in widely different ways. The former was of middle height, stout and florid, with round blue eyes and the

cheerfullest expression that ever irradiated a human countenance. He had grown up in the hotel business, father and grandfather before him having been landlords of the Mallow House. He was one of the kindest souls imaginable—yet no kinder than Mr. Jordano, for that would hardly be possible. The two friends were a singular contrast, Mr. Jordano being tall and slender, with an Italian cast of countenance, which was his pride and secret joy. The dark hair, worn somewhat long, with a wavy forelock (which could be thrown back with excellent dramatic effect in moments of emotion), the long, glossy, upward-curling moustache, the cloak, also long and glossy, now thrown jauntily over the left shoulder, now flapping joyously in the breeze, now drawn close in muffling mystery—these things were inseparable adjuncts of Italio, as he loved to call himself.

(One never knew just what these two dear gentlemen would say, or how they would say it! Mr. Jordano's peculiar speech was the result of an impediment only partially overcome. Mr. Mallow—was just Mr. Mallow! He was never explained, that I know of. When, as a child, I first heard him spoken of as "Marsh Malaprop" [one of Johanna Ross's sharp sayings], I took it all simply as an abbreviation of his full name and profession, "Marshall Mallow, Proprietor," as displayed in gilt letters under the sign, "Mallow House," which introduced the cheerful hostelry to strangers and wayfarers.)

If the light were in the left-hand window, however, they would advance briskly, lift the shining knocker, and let it fall—once! A double rap, they knew, would be considered importunate, if not impertinent; "imply-

ing that my hearing is defective, which is far from being the case, sir! far from being the case!"

On a certain pleasant April evening, the two friends did so lift the knocker. Mr. Quint opened the door himself, as was his custom. It was only when he was out that Mrs. Bullion, cook and housekeeper, was allowed that privilege.

"I know whom I think proper to admit into my house," said the Squire. "Samantha Bullion does not."

Mr. Quint opened the door, I say: first three inches, for the purpose of reconnoitering and identification, then wide, with a gesture of welcome. His gestures were austerely graceful, like his figure. It was as if the statue of Demosthenes in the Vatican should unfold its toga and wave its hand in greeting: only Demosthenes was, it would appear, as plain as Squire Quint was handsome.

"Welcome!" said the Squire. "I bid you welcome, Marshall; and you, Very! Step in! step in!"

He ushered the two gentlemen into the parlor, which was brightly lighted, with the gold-colored curtains drawn, and a gay little fire flickering behind the glass fire screen.

"Select your chairs!" he went on. "Omit this one, if you will be so good; it has taken the lines of my figure, and would not suit yours. Permit me to offer you cheroots; So! This is friendly of you, neighbors: this is distinctly friendly!"

"Thought we'd look in!" said Mr. Mallow comfortably, puffing at his cheroot. "Hadn't seen you for quite a spell, Squire; didn't know but you was laid up or somethin'; lots of aralagy and pewmonia round:

but you look as peart as pie crust, and dressed up to the nines, same as ever."

"The glass of fashion," murmured Mr. Jordano, "and the mould of form! Squire Quint is a model for us all-tall-tall!"

Mr. Quint settled his firm chin in his black satin stock.

"A' man," he observed, "of whatever age or station, should in my opinion take a decent interest in his own appearance. There is no reason why I should become a scarecrow on account of the rotary motion of the earth. At least, none with which I am acquainted! What news on the Rialto, Very?"

"The Rialto, sir—by which I understand you to mean the Street" (this for the benefit of Mr. Mallow, who was looking mystified), "is looking up: looking up! Should you not say so, Friend Mallow? Hanks has got his spring window arranged; it is a lovely sight, sir. The mingling of rich fabrics with exquisite tints of dawn and sunset is indeed a privilege for the eye-ti-ti to behold. We understand that Miss Lina Chanter's artistic taste and unerring eye is responsible for——"

"I shall read the *Centinel* to-morrow, Very!" said Mr. Quint, kindly. "I remember your account of Hanks's fall display; it was very creditable. What does Abram pay Lina for the work?"

"He don't pay her one red cent!" Mr. Mallow broke in hotly. "Not one red cent, and it's a condinged shame! I put it up to him once, and what do you think that old weasel said? Said he wouldn't insult Lina by offering payment for a labor of love, and he had considered her one of the family ever since

Mis' Hanks passed away. What do you think of that? Beyond givin' Elder Chanter the privilege of buryin' her free—Mis' Hanks, you understand—not one of them has ever see the color of Abram's money that *I* am aware of. He's grabaricious, that's what Abram is."

"Avaricious is possibly the word you have in mind, Friend Mallow?" Mr. Jordano suggested gently.

"Havaricious?" Mr. Mallow pondered. "Well, you've got to grab before you have, ain't that so? Have it your own way, though, Very! I'm not litt'ry, I'm pratical; that's what I am, pratical!"

"How is David Bygood?" asked the Squire blandly. "Let me offer you a light, Marshall; your cheroot has gone out."

He rose, and selecting with care a glowing brand, lifted it in the tongs and held it toward Mr. Mallow, who hastened to light his cheroot at it. Matches were one of Squire Quint's economies; they were still a novelty to him after fifty years, flint and steel and tinder box having been the order of his youth.

"How," he repeated, when this ceremony was concluded, "is David Bygood? He appeared poorly when I was in the store last week. I have felt some anxiety about David Bygood. He is—no longer young!"

The visitors exchanged glances. This was one of the objects of their visit.

"We are all anxious about Mr. Bygood!" said Mr. Jordano gravely.

"Old gentleman's failin' up!" chimed in Mr. Mallow. "It's his bronical tubes, you see. I expect they're wore out, pretty much: don't h'ist the air free,

what I mean is. Gustine Tooth says Dr. Pettijohn don't give him more'n——"

"A—" Mr. Jordano broke in hurriedly, "Dr. Pettijohn gives very little medicine, I think. It is the modern practice, I understand. We may hope that warm weather will bring renewed health to our beloved friend, but—as you say, he is no longer young, and we are anxious, sir. I am sure a visit from you-too-too—would be better than medicine to him, Mr. Quint."

"I shall call to-morrow, sir!" Mr. Quint assured him. "I shall make a point of calling to-morrow. I had no idea——"

The old gentleman rose abruptly and devoted some minutes to the meticulous arrangement of the wood fire; the two friends, meantime, behind his back, exchanging explanatory gestures of protest and admonition. Mr. Mallow liked to "get a thing off his chist!" Mr. Jordano was delicate-minded, and always avoided giving a shock, when it was possible.

"To convey an impression," he would say, "is the thing. To convey-tay-tay! The abrupt exposition of a fact is apt to be disturbing to the mental balance."

So, when Mr. Quint resumed his seat, Mr. Jordano hastened to change the subject. Blandly waving his hand toward the glittering cases, he said:

"I was wondering, sir, whether you would care to show us a few of your treasures this evening. It is a long time since I, for one, have enjoyed the privilege——"

Squire Quint rose and looked at his watch. "We have fifteen minutes," he said. "At nine, as you are

aware, I close the house. Is there any special box that you have in mind, Very?"

Mr. Jordano hesitated. "I—a—in fact—all are so interesting—if you would make a selection, sir!"

With a look of some contempt ("A' man should know his own mind, sir!" he was wont to say, "supposing him to have a mind to know!") the old gentleman unlocked a case, taking the key from his pocket, and selecting a small box, held it out on the palm of his hand. The two friends rose and bent over it with interest, unfeigned in one, perfunctory in the other.

"The Pompadour box!" Mr. Quint assumed an expository tone, as if addressing an audience. "Material, enamel on gold; subject of decoration, Jupiter presenting a crown of stars to Venus. The crown contains eighteen brilliants of the finest water; the figures are portraits of Louis XIV and Madame de Pompadour, the box being the King's gift to the favorite."

Mr. Mallow's eyes protruded. "By jings!" he said. "Was that the style—what I mean—they didn't go about that way, did they? I should think the police——"

"Classical draperies! classical draperies!" Mr. Quint waved the subject away. "The box when purchased was found to contain several grains of snuff, which proved under the microscope to be rappee of a peculiar nature, prepared exclusively for the king, and ground with a certain proportion of ambergris: hence the perfume!" He held the box to the noses of his visitors, who sniffed appreciatively.

"Astonishing!" said Mr. Mallow.

"Amazing!" said Mr. Jordano. "Was the use of —a—rappee—peculiar to royalty, may I ask, Mr. Quint?"

"By no means! It was as a rule less esteemed than macouba, vulgarly known as maccaboy, a more delicate snuff." (Here followed an accurate description of both varieties.) "The choice of rappee by the Pompadour was in accordance with the vulgarity of her mind. Madame de Sévigné used macouba alone; used it with such delicacy that it was considered a privilege to watch the operation, sir. Here—" he produced another box, of graceful proportions and exquisite workmanship, "is the box of that distinguished lady. Material, ivory, inlaid with lapis lazuli, initials in gold. No snuff remaining, but still fragrant, owing to attar of roses, a singularly lasting perfume, being used in the preparation of macouba. Observe!" He presented the box, and the two friends sniffed again.

"Astonishing!" said Mr. Mallow.

"Most impressive!" said Mr. Jordano.

"We now proceed to——"

Squire Quint checked himself in mid-sentence. A clock had begun to strike. He pulled out his watch; then carefully replaced Madame de Sévigné's snuff-box, closed and locked the case.

"Nine o'clock!" he said briefly. "My closing hour! I thank you for the favor of your company, and trust you will repeat the visit when convenient. Good night!"

The two gentlemen took a hurried departure. Mr. Quint looked at his watch again, then at the clock, and frowned heavily.

"Thirty seconds late!" he muttered. "I must not allow myself to be carried away by my subject. It shall not occur again!"

He secured the front door carefully, with lock, bolt and chain; then he called aloud, "Hippolyta!" and Miss Polly (he was the only person who called her anything else) came out from her sitting room, looking as if she had been napping, which indeed she had. She was the prettiest, tiniest old lady imaginable; so like a bird—a white-throated sparrow, say, or one of the lesser warblers—that one almost expected her to twitter instead of speak.

"You have been asleep, Hippolyta!" said Mr. Quint, severely.

"Perhaps I did just close my eyes, brother!" chirped Miss Polly. "I love to close my eyes in the evening quiet, and—meditate! The sound of voices in the parlor was agreeable and soothing—a——"

"You would be wise to retire at eight o'clock, as I have often advised," said Mr. Quint. "Bed is the proper place for sleep. Good night, Hippolyta!"

He kissed his sister's forehead lightly, and handed her her bedroom candle with a little bow.

"Good nighty! sleep tighty!" replied Miss Polly, as she had done ever since she could remember; and she tripped upstairs as lightly as if she were sixteen instead of sixty.

Mr. Quint looked after her with mingled affection and annoyance. He did not like to be told to "sleep tighty": it was absurd. "But we are as we are!" reflected the Squire. "Hippolyta is a good woman!" and turning into his library, he lit the reading lamp,

and taking a volume from the rack on his desk, settled down to the business of the evening.

True to his word, Squire Quint next morning, after dusting his books and washing the handle of his walking stick, made his leisurely way to the village, and presented himself at Bygoods'. The front shop was occupied only by a bright-eyed young woman, who was busy dusting and arranging the show case. Looking up, she uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Dear Squire!" she cried. "How do you do? I haven't seen you for forty years!"

Squire Quint looked at her with eyes that twinkled under frowning brows.

"Kitty," he said, "you have formed the habit of exaggerating: it is a pernicious one. You were at my house three days ago!"

"Well, it *seems* like forty years!" replied Mrs. Thomas Lee, quite unabashed. "Just think how handsome you are, Squire, and what a treat it is to see you. If I were you I should charge ten cents for every look at you—I mean me!"

"Pish!" Mr. Quint tried to frown again, without success this time. "You are an absurd young woman, Kitty! How is David Bygood?"

Kitty Lee's bright face fell.

"Very far from well!" she answered sadly. "No!" as Mr. Quint made a motion toward the inner room, "he isn't there! It's Tom you hear; Mr. Bygood asked him to go through the minerals and sort them out a bit. Squire dear—" she came out from behind the show case and laid her hand on the old man's arm—"Mr. Bygood hasn't been here since last week. I fear—I fear he may not be here again." The tears

came into her eyes; she brushed them away, and added hastily, "He wants to see you, Squire; he asked for you this morning. Tom was going round directly to tell you, but here you are, and I am so glad. You will find him changed: it came quite suddenly, two days ago—but his mind is perfectly clear and he wants to talk to you. Something about a box; perhaps you know?"

Mr. Quint nodded, and blinked his eyes several times.

"I know!" he said. "Ridiculous man! the most valuable specimen he has—a specially fine amethyst quartz—wants to give it to me, simply because it happens to be a snuffbox. Preposterous! I will go at once, Kitty! Good morning, Thomas!" as Tom Lee came out of the inner room, dusting his hands. "A fine morning, sir!"

"How are you, Squire? Look here! this collection is a most extraordinary—" he caught Kitty's eye and broke off; "extraordinarily fine morning, as you say!" he concluded lamely.

Mr. Quint waved the morning away.

"A most extraordinary hodgepodge, you were about to say. I have no illusions on the subject of David Bygood's collection of minerals, sir!" said Mr. Quint calmly. "It is largely rubbish: some valuable specimens, but largely rubbish. It is not necessary that he or the girls should know this!" he added fiercely. "Nobody's business but his own! I bid you good morning! Come—" his voice changed; "come and see us when you can, children! My sister wishes you to come to supper before you go—and so do I; observing the customary hours, you understand!"

"Indeed we will, Squire!" said Kitty.

"Love to!" said Tom heartily. "Let me open the door for you, sir! Don't forget your paper!"

"Poor old boy!" he added, as Mr. Quint hastened along the street toward the Bygoods' home, which was at some little distance, up by the Common in fact: "this will break him up terribly."

"Darling old thing, it surely will!" Kitty agreed. "What old lambs they are, both of them!"

"An old lamb is a sheep, Gentlewoman!" observed Tom, as he joined her behind the show case. "Dear old Mr. Bygood is not unsheeplike, I confess, but when it comes to the Squire—really, you know!"

It was very quiet in Mr. Bygood's room. The old man sat in his winged chair—it was easiest so for the tired heart—propped with snowy pillows. In his dressing gown (a wonderful affair, brought him from China by Tom; blue brocade, wadded and quilted, with gold embroidery fit for a mandarin) with his white hair falling over it, and his blue velvet cap to match, he looked like some exquisite old porcelain figure; as serene, as still, as remote from life. Beside him sat Miss Egeria, bending over some delicate sewing; Miss Almeria, in the background, was busy over an "Etna," whose odor of warm alcohol pervaded the room. It was very quiet; there was no sound save the crackling of the little fire, and the occasional soft rustle of Miss Almeria's dress as she moved about.

Suddenly Mr. Bygood raised his head. "Is Tertius coming?" he asked. "I hear a step! Let Tertius come up directly, Gerie dear!"

Astonishing how his hearing had sharpened, these last few days; it had been rather dull, but now——

Miss Egeria went out silently, and returned in a few minutes, ushering in Mr. Quint. The Squire had lost for the moment something of his dignified composure. His hand trembled as he smoothed back his silver hair; he cleared his throat, but seemed to find no words. It was Mr. Bygood who spoke, in a faint but clear voice.

"How do you do, Tertius? Very good of you to come! Gerie, love, a seat for the Squire! Thanks, dear child! Tertius, I wished to speak to you about the amethyst snuffbox."

"About the quartz specimen, David? Precisely! A—purely adventitious it's having being shaped into a box! My offer stands, David. If the specimen is worth anything, it is worth a hundred dollars. I will take it at that figure, sir. I will draw a check——"

Mr. Bygood looked up, a faint twinkle in his mild blue eyes.

"Tertius," he said, "to what bank will you make it payable?"

Squire Quint frowned heavily, and then raised his eyebrows till their black arches almost met the silver waves of his hair. "I do not understand you, David!" he said stiffly. "I fail to grasp your meaning, sir!"

Mr. Bygood laughed, the faint little ghost of a laugh, and laid his frail old hand on his friend's arm.

"No, you don't, Tersh!" he said. "You grasp it very well. And—and—you will not refuse my last gift, I know. Tertius, do you remember—I have been thinking over old times, sitting here—do you remem-

ber when we put Wim Wibird into the horse trough? Ha! ha! do you remember that?"

Mr. Quint's eyebrows went up and down several times; he cleared his throat, and drew out his handsome red silk handkerchief, apparently for the pleasure of looking at it, as he put it back directly.

"I remember, David!" he said huskily. "You and I and Ivory Cheeseman. How he spluttered when he came up!"

"We were bad boys, sir! bad boys!" the old gentleman shook his head with a chuckle.

Miss Egeria looking up in gentle protest, the Squire hastened to correct the statement.

"Ivory and I were the bad boys; you were the good one, David. Why, all the mothers in town used to borrow you, because you never got into mischief."

But at this Mr. Bygood's white head was shaken with feeble vehemence.

"No, sir! no, sir! I was as wild as any of you: as wild as any of you. Why—ha! ha! I remember once we stole a needle and some thread, and sewed up the sleeves of the parson's gown. On Saturday night we did it; when he came to put it on next morning, he could not make out what had happened. Ha! ha! limbs of Satan, he called us, when he found out: limbs of Satan! Ha! ha!"

"Father dear, I think perhaps I wouldn't talk much more!"

Miss Almeria came forward and laid a caressing hand on the old gentleman's shoulder. He looked up with a lovely smile.

"Not much more!" he repeated; "just a little, dearie, just a little! Tertius and I remember many things:

many things, dearie! I have been thinking of the old swimming hole, Tersh. How pleasant it was there! Do you remember the big willow that hung over the water? We jumped off it—at least I did; I never could learn to dive like you and Ivory; jumped off into the clear water—very pleasant! The lucky bugs went scattering, don't you remember, like drops of water; and do you remember the big snapping turtle we found? It was you and Ivory who put him in Wim's bed; I was taking care of little Neddy Peters that day, while his mother went shopping."

"What did I tell you?" said the Squire. "Mrs. Peters never asked Ivory or me to take care of Neddy! Well! I think I will bid you good morning, David!" he added, rising. "I will come again——"

He stopped. Mr. Bygood was trying to rise from his chair; he was smiling, and a flush had risen in his ivory cheeks.

"I'll come along, Tersh!" he said in a thin, piping voice, the voice—almost—of a little boy. "We'll toll in Ivory as we go along. It's a great—day—for swimming!"

They were all round him; Miss Almeria had him in her arms; Miss Egeria held one hand, Mr. Quint the other. Very gently they set him back in his chair; he made a little gesture, of thanks or greeting—drew a quiet breath——

"He is gone!" said Miss Almeria. "Sister, he is gone, as he wished to go. Dear Mr. Quint, do not distress yourself, I beg! It is all quite as he would have wished it. There is no more to say!"

That was what every one felt; we could all rejoice

for our dear old friend, slipping away in a dream of his boyhood. What we found hard to bear was the sequel: the death, within a short ten days, of Miss Almeria. Who could ever have dreamed of it? She had scarcely had a day's illness in her life; she had watched and tended the delicate sister, the ageing father, with a strength which never seemed to fail. Yet it was she, not Miss Egeria, who took cold at her father's funeral. Pneumonia followed; now she, too, was gone, the dear, stately, handsome woman whom every one had loved and admired all her life, who remained in the minds of most of us, the Beauty of Cyrus, despite her fifty-odd years. The blow was heavy on all Cyrus. Mr. Mallow pulled down with his own hand all the shades of the Mallow House, and retreated into his private sitting room, where he sat forlorn among his antimacassars, leaving Billy to manage boarders and transients as best he could.

"I won't be alloyed and interrumpted!" he said violently, when Rosanna Sullivan came for orders. "I don't care what you give 'em for dinner! Give 'em fish bones and apple cores: good enough for 'em!" and Rosanna said "Holy Moses!" and went away.

Mr. Very Jordano, in his editorial sanctum, was even more deeply stricken. He had worshiped Miss Almeria for twenty years, without hope, but without despair, taking soberly the friendly half loaf she gave him, and finding sustenance and delight therein. To her he had read his choicest effusions, sure of her kindly sympathy and comprehension: with her he had discussed the aims and scope of the *Cyrus Centinel,* the second devotion of his gentle life. Now she was gone, and the world seemed very empty.

Madam Flynt in her green-and-gold parlor, talking with Miss Cornelia Croly, her friend and companion: Judge and Mrs. Peters in their sober, handsome library; all the Chanters in the Chantery; Tom and Kitty Lee, side by side on the old leather sofa before the fire at Ross House; all the kind, affectionate Cyrus neighbors, mourned deeply for Miss Almeria; all asked one another with troubled hearts, "What is to become of Egeria?"

Tom and Kitty solved the problem—I was going to say, as usual; they certainly solved a good many Cyrus problems. Tom with his clear, humorous common sense, Kitty with her radiant sympathy and comprehension—already in the short two years of their married life, Cyrus had formed the habit of turning to them in any difficulty which threatened the village peace. So now, when a hard knot had come in Cyrus' thread, they cut it with one cheerful stroke, by taking Miss Egeria with them to California.

"It's perfectly simple, dear soul," said Kitty to the bewildered little lady. "Tom has to build a huge bridge over a cañon. It's no place for Baby, so he and I are to stay in a delightful cottage in an almond grove—or orchard, does one say?—on the Leighs' ranch: you know, those nice funny people I told you about, who were so good to us on our wedding trip. Well! but of course I shall be wanting to go and play with Tom, and pat the bridge, and give it good advice, every week or two, and *who* is to stay with Jenny Tucker and Baby? I can't leave them alone, and Lina thinks she ought not to go, with her mother's rheumatism and all, and—well, Zephine is flighty, you know——"

"Yes!" murmured Miss Egeria. "Zephine *is* flighty —though well-meaning, dear! All the Chanters are well-meaning."

"Of course! they are all lambs, only they frisk in varying degrees. Well! and so—you see, darling, there is no one but you who *can* go, and you wouldn't desert Tom and Baby, would you? To say nothing of me!"

There was really nothing to say to this. Miss Egeria, little bewildered shallop adrift on a sea of loneliness, was taken in tow by the strong tug "Duke of Lee," and—my metaphor breaks down!—they all went to California together, and the Bygood Bishopric —I would say book store—another took.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW NEIGHBORS

CYRUS, after the first shock (for it *was* a shock to have Emmeline Tooth, who had "meeched and mourned ever since she had the use of language" come riding back in her coach as a millionaire)! Cyrus, I say, after the first shock, rallied round its new neighbors "as one bein'," to quote Mr. Mallow. Mrs. Judge Peters, who had been at school with poor Emmy, went to New York on purpose to choose her rugs and curtains. Mr. Mallow hemmed a set of "wipers" for her, and saw to the renovating of the good old furniture with which the house was tolerably well stocked, lending Rosanna Sullivan and Billy and standing over them while they rubbed and scrubbed and polished.

Of course this, like all the rest, was wholly unnecessary. Of course, the inheritor of a million dollars had only to wave a hand, and an army of skilled workers would have sprung up like magic; but that was not Cyrus' way. And besides, "you can't buy elbow-grease," said Mr. Mallow, "nor yet gumption!"

Kitty and Tom Lee worked in the garden, bringing plants, cuttings, seeds, from their own and every other garden in Cyrus. The Chanters did wonders in the way of doing up sash curtains, bureau covers, table linen and the like. The ample linen room was stored with the household plenishing of Russell Gaylord's mother, damask, huckaback and birdseye, all yellow

with age, but still good, and very good. "Seventy sheets, if you will believe me, my dear, and ten pair of them linen, hemstitched *and* embroidered: and Emmeline never bought a pair of so much as bleached in her life!"

In short, Cyrus really spent itself in efforts to have the great house homelike on the day of Mrs. Tooth's arrival. There were flowers in every room. The table was laid with much splendor of glass and silver (Mrs. Peters had seen to this also) and spread with a cold collation which one pair of hands only in Cyrus could have produced.

"And I hope this is a fine catouse to make over Emmeline Jebus!" said Sarepta Darwin, housekeeper and ruler of the Lees, as she surveyed the scene. "There! If you ask me, I call it childish."

"I didn't ask you!" remarked Mrs. Peters; "and I'd bet my new bonnet that you have put in more work than anybody else, Sarepta. I know something about that chicken pie; as to the cake, it comes from a guilty conscience; don't tell me! Who tied Emmy's pigtails to the back of the seat in class?"

Sarepta Darwin sniffed. "Anyway, I didn't have to go to New York to salve my conscience. I guess I'll take that bunnet, Mis' Peters!"

It had appeared that morning that almost everybody in Cyrus had some errand to "Gaylord's," or at least to its immediate neighborhood, scheduled for the afternoon: it seemed probable that the new proprietors would make their entry amid serried ranks of Cyrusians, drawn up on either side the entrance. Kitty Lee, realizing this about noon, took hurried counsel with Lina Chanter, with Aunt Johanna Peters,

with Sarepta, and then betook herself to the telephone. Would everybody *please* come and have tea with her that afternoon? Her Japanese irises were out, and this was the day: the paper said rain to-morrow; they (the irises) would be all beaten down; she should expect them all (the neighbors) without fail! They would have tennis, too (this to the younger ones), so let them come early and make an afternoon of it!

It was a very successful tea; everybody enjoyed himself immensely: but Mr. and Mrs. Chanter and Lina were not there. They were waiting in the doorway of the great house when Mr. and Mrs. Tooth drove up in their new victoria, with the long-tailed jet-black horses which had been the second dream of Mr. Tooth's life. Mrs. Chanter, rosy and motherly, her kind face puckered in smiles of mingled welcome and sympathy (she *was* so sorry for the poor rich things!) Lina in her soft, dusky beauty, like a damask rose, ready to melt or kindle at a look or a word—only these three met the bewildered eyes of Mrs. Tooth as she raised them for the first look at her new home. Her first outburst of weeping was on Mrs. Chanter's broad, motherly bosom.

"There! poor thing!" cried the minister's wife. "There! I know *just* how you feel. Come in here with me, and rest a little! This is your own little sitting room—that is, if you like it!"

Lina and Kitty had arranged the little sitting room specially for this moment. Here were collected such bits of parlor furniture as had best survived the jaunt from Tupham. The horsehair lounge, a sturdy article, spite of its "jammed-down" springs and bristling horsehair, occupied the place of honor opposite the fire-

place; the wing chair, its missing leg supplied, stood in the corner, "drape" and all: on the walls hung the dim steel engravings of the Voyage of Life and the Deathbed of Lincoln. The very flowers—only cinnamon roses and spiræa—were in a cracked blue jug that had long been Mrs. Tooth's pride. "Much as fifty years old!" she was wont to proclaim with melancholy pride. At sight of it now, the forlorn little woman gave a cry of pleasure.

"There!" she cried. "I looked everywhere in creation for that jug. I thought 'twas lost for sure. I'm proper glad 'twas found! Why, there's Father's lounge! Oh! oh! to think it and me should be somewhere else! Why, this is real homey!" and she wept afresh. . . .

Everything adjusts itself, even an eighteen-day Wonder. (We wonder eighteen days in Cyrus, instead of nine; we have not so very many wonders—though quite enough for a tranquil community.) A week after the arrival, Mrs. Sharpe met Lina Chanter in at Cheeseman's and bustled up to her.

"Well! Lina! so you're going home to-day, I hear. And how are the Dental Parlors?"

Lina looked up. "You mean Dr. Fessenden's?" she asked mildly. "I haven't been there lately."

"He! he! no! I mean the new Set of Teeth at Gaylord's. You've been staying there, I understand, ever since they came."

"I had a *very* pleasant time!" said Lina. "The gardens are lovely, and Mr. and Mrs. Tooth were *so* kind! May I have half a pound of molasses chips, Mr. Cheeseman, please?"

Mr. Cheeseman, weighing out the chips, surveyed

the girl with pleasure under his bushy eyebrows. The damask flush was deep on her soft cheek, and her dark eyes—one thought they were brown till one saw they were violet—very bright.

"Talkin' of chips," said the old man—"was you lookin' for anything special, Mis' Sharpe? It's nine o'clock! Don't mention it; good day!—talkin' o' chips—now that woman has been in here every day this week, and tasted every livin' thing in the store, and never bought so much as a stick; she is certainly the limit, but you handled her jest right, Lina. It takes you quiet ones! What's your hurry? Try them lemon creams, and see if they ain't jest a mite extra this week; it appeared so to me. Take a seat! I haven't seen you for a month o' Sundays. So you've been helpin' Emmeline settle in, have you? Good job, too! Is she mournin' still?"

Lina settled herself comfortably in a corner, and took out a businesslike little housewife.

"If you'll take off that coat, Uncle Ivory," she said, "I'll mend it while I eat my candy—if you'll give me two pieces. Your elbow has gone right through! Aren't you ashamed, not to have told me before?"

"I don't know as I am, special!" chuckled Mr. Cheeseman. "Go on, little gal!"

"I thought you were going to talk about chips!" said Lina, with gentle malice. "Well, Uncle Ivory, they are *dear* people: I've had a lovely time with them. Mrs. Tooth does mourn a good deal, poor thing, but I don't wonder, do you? Just *think* what a shock! But Mr. Tooth is so kind and patient with her, and oh, *so* happy! I never saw anybody enjoy money

before! Of course, I never knew any one who had much!"

"I want to know if he does!"

Mr. Cheeseman came out from behind his counter, and settled himself comfortably at the little table beside which Lina sat.

"Got used to it a'ready, has he?"

"Oh, no! that is half the fun of it. He is just as much surprised as ever. When he reads his mail in the morning—there are always a great many begging letters—it's astonishing how quickly people find out about money, isn't it? I mean about people's having it! When he reads his letters, first he rumples his poor hair all up, and says, 'Dreadful! dreadful! what is to be done?' And then he remembers, and says, 'Bless my soul! how fortunate this is!' and begins drawing checks as fast as ever he can. He drew fourteen checks yesterday, and Mrs. Tooth cried all the time, and said 'twas fortunate she knew the way to the poorhouse, and that the Baileys were kind folks. Poor soul! I am so sorry for her. And she says—here's your coat, Uncle Ivory—no! I must take these spots out. Wait!" She slipped quietly into the back shop and returned with a bowl of warm water and a napkin. "I do wish you would get a nice wife to keep you tidy!"

"There's no woman in Cyrus I'll marry except you!" said Mr. Cheeseman stoutly. "And just because of a matter of fifty years between us, you act this way! What is it Emmeline says?"

"She says there's only one thing in the world can make her happy, and that is twins."

"What!" Mr. Cheeseman almost knocked over the

bowl of water in his amazement. "What are you talking about, Lina? Is the woman out of her senses?"

"Oh, no! But you see she has never had any children of her own, and she thinks if she had twins she might be happy. You see—if you wouldn't fidget, Uncle Ivory, I should get it done quicker—Mr. Tooth told her she could have anything she wanted, and she said that was the only thing she did want. There's a place in New York, you know, where they have careful children—I mean careful people's children; I said I'd write and see what I could do. Of course twins aren't so easy as single children. There, Uncle Ivory, now you are lovely. And I'll marry you the very minute your hair begins to curl!"

"I wish you wouldn't hurry!" said the old man, as Lina slipped her housewife back into her pocket and rose from her seat. "If you must go, take a half a pound of the creams, just for luck! here! Good-by, little gal!"

Mr. Cheeseman looked after her affectionately.

"Nice gal!" he meditated. "You take a village that's got two gals in it like her and Kitty Ross—I would say Lee—and you've got a durn pleasant place to live in, even with them mean Sharpes thrown in. Where's she goin' now?"

He peered out of the window after Lina.

"In to Tooth's; have to dry-nuss *him* a spell, I expect. Wal, this won't bile no molasses!"

He turned into his back kitchen, even as Lina turned into the Pharmacy.

What a wonderful place it was! It was not only the jasper; the whole shop glittered like a fairy palace. From the tiled floor to the fretted ceiling everything

glowed and gleamed with color and polish. The great vases in the window held liquid amethyst, ruby, topaz: the crystal jars on the shelves showed softer tints, warm browns and ambers: their gold labels spoke mystic things unutterable.

"Ha!" said the Reverend Timothy Chanter, rubbing his hands genially. He had come in to buy a toothbrush, but lingered, as everybody did, to admire and congratulate.

"I perceive you are a poet as well as a pharmacist, Mr. Tooth."

He indicated the glittering phials and vases.

"'Lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon,' eh, Mr. Tooth?"

Mr. Tooth bowed, pleased but puzzled. "Cinnamon syrup, sir?" he asked. "We have it in combination with several ingredients: this is an elegant preparation: cinnamon and hypophos——"

Mr. Chanter explaining that he was quoting John Keats, Mr. Tooth bowed again, a little more distantly, and said he was unfamiliar with the name, but would look it up in the *Druggist's Circular*.

Lina found Mr. Tooth in the act of tying up a neat white-paper parcel with pink string. (He had decided on pink after much thought. Blue had been his first choice, but pink, he thought, might be more agreeable to the ladies. He put this question to Kitty Lee, who assented, adding something about "braiding locks with rosy twine." Mr. Tooth bowed, and ventured to suggest the "Fluffy Fedora" as an elegant hair curler.)

Mr. Tooth looked up happily at Lina's entrance.

"Miss Lina," he said, "you come like flowers in May. I was just desiring the advice of a refined lady.

The matter of perfumery! All these various lists have been sent me—by all the high-class druggists of the country. Very gratifying, I am sure. Florabell Brothers; I never could have thought of carrying any of their goods in my previous position: prices very high, you understand. But now—and here is the Cleopatra Company." Mr. Tooth accented the second syllable. "Quite out of sight, you know, I have always considered Cleopatra preparations. Cleopatra's Cyclamen Chalice—very chaste! The question is—would these goods be acceptable to—a—the ladies of Cyrus? My one wish, as you well know, is to please!"

Lina, always gentle, was firm in her opinion that high-priced perfumes were not necessary to the ladies of Cyrus. Nor quite suitable, did Mr. Tooth really think? Orris was always suitable, and lemon verbena. Strong perfumes were not exactly—perhaps?

Mrs. Judge Peters, whom Lina met on her way home, nodded emphatically on hearing of this.

"I should think so!" she said. "Tell the man that if he wants to make painted Jezebels of us, he'd better go back to Tupham! The idea! Perfume not quite like paint? Don't tell me! It's the ladder that leads to it. 'Still to be powdered, still perfumed'—humph!"

CHAPTER IV

ENTER TIMOTHY TENTERDEN

TO return to Bygood's. When Mr. Bygood died, we supposed that "the girls" would carry on the book store, as they had practically done for the last ten or fifteen years. When Miss Almeria followed him, Cyrus woke up with a start, and asked, "*What* is to become of the business?"

Out of the question for Miss Egeria to carry it on alone: out of the question, when one came to think of it, for her to have anything to do with it. She must have complete change, Dr. Pettijohn said; every one agreed with him, and the Tom Lees, as we have seen, arranged the matter: but what *was* to become of the business? Impossible to give up our book store! It lent a stamp, as Mr. Jordano said. ("What ye talkin' 'bout?" interjected Mr. Mallow. "I never borrowed a stamp there, and never see no one else. Post office next door, anyway.")

To some of us, Bygood's had been "a Temple of the Muses and Graces in one. The noble, the beautiful, the true-too-too—were accustomed to hover—" Mr. Jordano stopped abruptly, and turned to examine the books on the shelf behind him.

He was in the back shop, and there were others there. No meeting had been called: they had just dropped in, a group of old friends, as they had dropped in every day for many years: Judge Peters, Mr. Jordano, Mr. Mallow, and somewhat later Squire

Quint. The others rose respectfully as the older man entered the back shop where they were collected; Mr. Mallow pushed forward the old armchair.

"Take a seat, Squire!" he said. "This is a cat's trophy, ain't it? We're all balled up! Take a seat!"

Mr. Quint made an austere gesture of refusal, and sat down on a stool; the armchair remained vacant.

"You come most opportunely, Squire!" Mr. Jordano hastened to assure him. "We were discussing the future of this hallowed—a—in short, spot! We feel that for Bygood's to be given up-pup-pup—would be a calamity which, superimposed upon the bereavements which have lately well-nigh crushed our once cheerful community, would—a——"

"Bile it down, Very!"

Mr. Mallow had been fidgeting on his stool. "You can let out in the paper all you've a mind to. All about it, Squire, store's got to be kep' up. Question is, who's goin' to keep it? Tom and Kitty and Lina's takin' it by turns now, but they can't kerry it on, nor yet it ain't fittin'—who's that comin' in? I told Lina not let anybody in here."

A querulous voice was heard in the front shop, and Lina's soft tones in reply.

"No, Wilson, the gentlemen are engaged. No, not on any account! no! better go away quietly; Billy is just outside——"

The front door slammed and silence fell. Mr. Mallow's kindly face flushed.

"Wilson's got nerve!" he said presently, "if he hasn't much else. His Ma told me he meant to 'ply for the job; he's about as fit for it as that mongrel pup

of his; no need to tell you that, Jedge, nor you, Squire."

The two gentlemen, who were Mr. Bygood's executors, nodded assent and comprehension.

"It beats me," Mr. Mallow went on, "the way orneriness mosses on to them Wibirds; father to son, father to son! There was Wim, this boy's father; well there! my sister married him, and he was the best of the lot, but yet you wouldn't say he amounted to a bent pea stick. I make no doubt you rec'lect old Wilson, his grandfather, Squire Quint?"

Mr. Quint nodded. "And old Wimberley, his great-grandfather," he assented. "All tarred with the same stick, sir: tarred with the same stick. My ancestor was right; they have not been allowed to prosper."

He turned abruptly to Judge Peters. "Edward, who is the young man I found with Egeria just now? Tenterden, he called himself. He spoke of a letter from the man Tooth, and said he intended calling on you. In fact, I think he said he had written to you."

Judge Peters cleared his throat, looking a trifle embarrassed.

"He has lost no time!" he said. "I was about to speak of this, when our friend—" he bowed to Squire Quint— "came in. Timothy Tenterden: a good old Puritan name, by the way. He is a nephew of Mr. Tooth; just arrived, I take it, from Missouri. His mother—a New England woman—desiring to return to this part of the country, the young man wrote to Mr. Tooth, asking his advice. Mr. Tooth—who is my client—consulted me as to the possibility of his—I will not say filling, but occupying to the best of his ability, the position lately and lamentably become vacant. I

suggested that it might not be amiss for the young man to come to Cyrus to look over the ground, and to give us the opportunity of looking *him* over. He has certainly lost no time. May I ask how he impressed you, Squire?"

"Why, favorably enough!" The Squire frowned judicially, and then raised his eyebrows till the black arches met the silver wave of his hair: a favorite movement of his, which strangers found disconcerting in a high degree. "A personable youth, and well-mannered; distinctly well-mannered. At the same time I am of opinion that we should exercise great caution in this case; great caution, sir. Missouri is a long way off, and the ideas and customs of the Middle West are, I understand, no less far removed from those of—we will say Cyrus and its neighborhood."

All endorsed this sentiment heartily. The young fellow must be put through his spaces, Mr. Mallow opined. To keep this store, you had to have faculty, that's where it was. If you didn't conjingle with the folks, there wouldn't be no combustin about it. It was agreed that young Tenterden should be inspected by each of the executors separately, and by the two of them together.

"As to how far his connection with the man Tooth may militate for or against him," said the Squire, "I am not prepared to say."

At this a murmur arose, of respectful protest. The millionaire druggist had already been adopted by young and middle-aged Cyrus. He was "Gustine" to some, "Friend Tooth" to others; others again hailed him genially as "Doc." "The man Tooth" was really —really!

"I think," said Judge Peters firmly, "that, with deference to your opinion, sir, Mr. Tooth's endorsement would go far toward recommending this young man, or any one. He has been my client for over a year, and I have found him a man of probity and benevolence."

"Not a mite o' harm in Gustine!" Mr. Mallow chimed in. "Not a mite! If he was cider, you'd say he warn't twenty-four hours out of the press; no, sir!"

"He is a man of sentiment also," observed Mr. Jordano. "His admiration of poetry and art-tart-tart is agreeable to witness; agreeable to witness. One cannot but recognize in him a lover of the beautiful and the true-too-too!"

While this conversation was going on, a colloquy of a very different nature was being held in Miss Egeria's parlor. Alas! Miss Egeria's alone now. She had not used it much since loneliness came upon her; it seemed easier to stay in the bright, cosy upstairs room which had used to be the nursery in which two happy little girls played, and later the sewing room, boudoir, or what you will, where two sweet women loved to sit together over their work.

A visitor, however, must be received in the parlor; in the parlor, therefore, Miss Egeria sat and interviewed Timothy Tenterden.

She felt a heavy responsibility in this interview; she must—she said to herself—so far as her inferior powers permitted, take Sister's place now; she must exercise Judgment and Discretion; above all, she must maintain Dignity.

She sat very straight in her chair, dear Miss Egeria!

Her feet were crossed (not above the instep! *"never* above the instep, my love! your ankles might become visible!" What would the Ladies Bygood have said in this year of grace?) her delicate hands rested lightly on her silken lap. She raised her chin, because Sister always said it imparted an air of dignity: a light flush was on her soft white-rose cheek.

Timothy Tenterden, sitting opposite her, erect and alert, very businesslike without, very shy and boyish within, thought her almost the loveliest thing he had ever seen. Almost, not quite! A vision rose before him, the same that had risen—hardly more vividly—the first time he entered the shop. Dark, liquid eyes full of soft fire; damask-rose cheeks under long curling lashes; a mouth that was too beautiful ever to be disturbed—and then so infinitely more beautiful when it broke into a smile, and shaped itself into words, wonderful, gracious, queenly, heavenly words—("How do you do, Mr. Tenterden?" Lina had said. "I am glad to welcome you to Cyrus!")

He started and came back to earth as Miss Egeria addressed him.

"Are you a *good* young man, Mr. Tenterden?" she asked, with what she almost feared was undue severity. She would not alarm the young man—but the young man's sole instinct was to put his arms round her and say, "There! there! we'll make it all right!" He refrained from this action, and replied frankly.

"Not specially good, I'm afraid, Miss Bygood; but not specially bad, either, I hope."

This was rather disturbing; Miss Egeria's voice quivered slightly, and she added (or thought she added) a shade of austerity to her manner.

"You—have no bad habits? Bygood's has always maintained a high standard."

Mr. Tenterden reviewed himself an instant. "I don't think so!" he announced cheerfully. "I think I'm fairly industrious. I don't drink, nor gamble."

"Nor use tobacco in any form?"

Timothy Tenterden's countenance fell slightly. "Well—of course I never smoke in business hours!" he said. "I would never think of smoking in the store, Miss Bygood."

Miss Egeria sighed gently. She was aware that many gentlemen indulged in a practice which——

"I could not expect to dictate as to your—a—recreations!" she said gently. "We will pass to other matters, if you please."

To Timothy Tenterden, fresh from the Middle West, this interview was as singular as it was delightful. His mother was a New England woman, but she had lived long in Missouri, and her comfortable, sensible motherliness had nothing in common with this wonderful little lady, who was simply an exquisite piece of Dresden china come to life. He felt himself a wholly different clay; rough, primitive pottery, hardly even glazed. What was she saying?

"Perhaps you will be so kind as to give me a brief outline of your life, since you came to man's estate, Mr. Tenterden! I could then judge how nearly our aims and ideals coincide."

Miss Egeria was pleased with this sentence; it certainly sounded like Almeria; she folded her delicate hands and waited: Timothy, after a glance half rueful and all admiring, took the plunge.

"My father died when I was twelve, and mother

brought me up. He had a small family hotel, and she kept on with it; she was a good manager, and friends with everybody. You would like mother, I am sure, Miss Bygood."

Miss Egeria bent her head with what was meant for cautious, but was merely kindly courtesy!

"I got through high school. She wanted me to go to college, but I didn't see that. I couldn't let her go on doing for me, when I was big enough to start in doing for her. Of course I had done the chores and all that ever since father died; I kept right on with those morning and evening, and I got a job taking care of a doctor's horse and driving him round—that was in the forenoon—and afternoons I helped in the drug store; that way I had the evening to study, you see, and I kept up as well as I could. Of course it wasn't like college, but Dr. Pressy lent me books, and I bought a few from college fellows who were graduating, and I got on first-rate. I had to step lively, though!" He looked up with a smile so warm and glowing that Miss Egeria kindled at it.

"My dear young man; what a *very* arduous life! I wonder you were not exhausted. Your mother must have been extremely anxious about your health."

The young man's smile softened into tenderness.

"No, ma'am, no! Mother isn't the anxious kind. She gave me her advice in the beginning—when I left school, I would say—and she expected me to follow it. 'Whenever you can, rest your tongue and let your ears do the work; when you have to speak, speak the truth; drink cold water, and keep your feet dry!' That was about all mother ever said to me, in that way, you understand. It was a good life; I liked it."

"And—and then something occurred to change your plans?" Miss Egeria hinted delicately.

"Yes, ma'am! Uncle Gustine came into his fortune. He's mother's half brother, you see. Her mother married his father for her second. The money came from his Uncle Wisdom—great name, isn't it? Wisdom Tooth! I used to think he made it up, but it seems not—so nothing came our way, and we never heard of it till Uncle Gustine wrote and told mother, and asked us to come and live with him. Mighty good of him, wasn't it? He's a good sort, Uncle Gustine!"

"Indeed! This is most interesting, Mr. Tenterden. I have the pleasure of a slight acquaintance with your uncle, and Mrs. Tooth I have known from girlhood. Do I understand that you and your mother intend to make your home with them?"

Timothy Tenterden shook his head with a smile. He didn't think that would work: mother was used to her own ways, you understood. Aunt Emmeline was everything that was kind and hospitable, but—"We've come for a month's visit!" he said. "Mother and Uncle Gustine are enjoying being together, and she will have a rest, the first she has ever had since I remember. My idea was to leave her here and go to the City to look for work; but I went into your store, and—well, Miss Bygood, it took my fancy, somehow, more than any store I ever was in. The books and the stationery, and the nice folks coming in, and—and—" (And Lina Chanter, Timothy? Why not be honest, and own up at once?) "I thought," he concluded lamely, "'twould be the pleasantest work I could think of, and I thought maybe

I could give satisfaction. I'd make a good try for it, I know that."

He looked up inquiringly, and Miss Egeria's heart went out to him. Not because he was good-looking; not because his eyes were blue and bright, his mouth firm and merry, his nose sufficiently straight, his head well set on broad square shoulders: no indeed! He was *good;* she knew he was good! He had a candid countenance. Father and Almeria would be satisfied, she felt assured. She held out her little trembling hand. The young man took it reverentially, and after looking at it a moment, lifted it softly to his lips. The action surprised him as much as it did Miss Egeria; they did not kiss hands, in Scarlett City, Missouri; but—"Honestly," he told his mother later, "I couldn't seem to help it; it was so pretty, like some wonderful pearl shell, you know; and so soft, and—mother, the tears came into her eyes, and she colored like a girl. Do you suppose she minded much?"

"I do not!" said Mother Tenterden. "I suppose she was pleased; she'd better be!"

When the four gentlemen waited on Miss Egeria half an hour later (they dropped in one by one, and greeted one another in an off-hand manner, as if the meeting were by chance), they found her mind quite made up. Subject to their approval, of course, she hastened to add in her pretty, deferential way. She had deferred to people all her life, dear Miss Egeria. "I have not sister's mind, my love," she would say, "and many people are so much better informed than I!"

"It would ill become me," she said now, "to make any decision to which my kind friends would be

averse: but I do like the young man, Mr. Quint; I think sister would like him, and I am quite sure dear father would. He is so genial and pleasant; that means so much, you know, in business!"

Miss Egeria always pronounced the word "business" with a capital B, as it were; it was so mysterious, and fraught with such possibilities: sister understood every aspect of it: sister was a Master Mind!

"If you are satisfied, Egeria," said Squire Quint kindly, "and if—as I understand—Edward Peters undertakes to vouch for the young man's personal integrity and financial soundness—" Judge Peters bowed assent—"there is, I opine, nothing more to be said. It is needless for us to assure you that we, as friends of your father, your sister and yourself, stand ready to give whatever assistance may be in our power to you, and to any one whom you may approve. I speak, I trust, for us all, citizens—or more correctly denizens—of Cyrus as well as friends of the family."

He glanced round.

"Surely! surely!" said Judge Peters heartily. "Egeria knows that she can rely upon us."

"Bet the last nail in my coffin she can!" exclaimed Mr. Mallow.

Mr. Jordano, much overcome, murmured something about "heart's blood—the last drop-top-top!"

Miss Egeria wept openly, declaring that no one had ever had such wonderful friends raised up to her; she hoped—oh, she *hoped* she was thankful enough!

So it was settled; and when Miss Egeria departed for California, it was with a quiet, if not a light heart, and a feeling that Bygood's was in safe and suitable hands.

Surely, if enthusiasm meant success, Timothy Tenterden was sure of succeeding. Not even his Uncle Gustine across the way, radiant amid his jasper fittings, was more enraptured with his surroundings. He began by painting white everything that could be painted; three coats of white lead and one of enamel: not the front shop only, but the dim little back shop sitting room where Mr. Bygood had dreamed and dozed away his later years. People were startled at first; some were shocked. It was asked whether this was proper respect to show to the memory of a sainted man. Abram Hanks for one thought it no less than scandalous. With Mr. Tooth it was different; a man with millions had to spend them some way, Abram presumed, and he didn't know but fancy fittings was all right for them as liked 'em, though give him something meller, for his taste. But for a young whippersnapper from Lord-knows-where—Missouri? Well, them places might look well on the map, but give him the State of Maine in his—for a young cock-a-nose like that to come whiskin' and whistlin' into the street, paintin' here and sploshin' there, with no more respect for the dead than if he was whitewashin' a hencoop, why, if you asked him, Abram Hanks, he didn't call it decent.

It was felt to be not unnatural that Abram should resent the refreshing and embellishing of Bygood's. It *was* next door to his own dingy emporium, and the contrast was certainly startling. "Hanks's" was dark and close, with a smell of yellow flannel; the orange-yellow variety, which seems to have vanished from the world to-day, but which then abounded, and jostled the red and gray on Hanks's dim shelves. It had cer-

tain sovereign qualities: one made petticoats of it, whereas for a bandage for sore throat, or a chest protector, red was imperative. When one bought flannel of Abram Hanks, he always said, "You don't care about the selvage, I s'pose!" If one thoughtlessly acquiesced, or even hesitated, off came the useful "list," to be made by Mrs. Hanks into soft shoes, or used for window strips, or——

"Child!" said my mother; "why did you let him have it? I have worn list garters ever since you were born, and I was just needing a new pair!"

But to return to Timothy Tenterden. When his white paint was dry, he proceeded to arrange things according to his fancy, which was a lively one. He liked symmetry and architectural effects. His boxes of envelopes were arranged like a child's building blocks, in towers and stairways, with causeways of "pads" connecting them. Packs of playing-cards presented castellated effects, striking and attractive to the eye—unless the eye belonged to one who considered cards the devil's play books, and the selling of them little better than Black Magic. Copy books and magazines were displayed on the walls in fan-shaped groups, secured by ingenious devices of wire. As for the small articles in the show case, pens, pencils, pocketbooks and the like, they were so beautifully arranged, it seemed almost wrong to suggest their disturbance. The Reverend Timothy Chanter pointed this out in a friendly way. He and his young namesake were already on familiar terms, having many tastes in common.

"I came," said Mr. Chanter, "to buy a dozen Falcon pens; but I question, my young namesake, whether I

should be justified in asking you to disturb this wonderful sunburst of steel. One thinks twice, you know, before destroying a work of art."

Timothy Tenterden threw back his head with his joyous laugh.

"Ah! but don't you see," he said, as he carefully removed the pens, "that you are simply giving me a chance to make another sunburst, perhaps a better one. 'Excelsior' is my motto, Mr. Chanter. Look in to-morrow and see if I haven't improved upon this arrangement! But—speaking of arrangements, won't you come and see what wonders this young lady—" he bowed to Lina, who had come in with her father—"has wrought in the back shop? It should be called the Bower! the Bower of Beauty!"

"Oh, Mr. Tenterden!" protested Lina. "It was all your idea: I only helped a little!"

"You only chose the colors and the materials, and planned the arrangement!" laughed Timothy. "The white paint I own to; all the rest is yours, Miss Chanter; enter your Bower!"

With a bow half shy, half eager, he drew aside the curtain, and ushered them into the transformed Back Shop. Lina cried out in delight. Transformed indeed! for dingy drab of walls, mouldings, window casings, gleaming white; for dull green moreen and deadly black horsehair, gay flowered chintz, scarlet poppies on a tawny ground. The glass cases which filled the wall spaces shone like crystal; in one, Mr. Bygood's collection of minerals was displayed, and it was evident that each specimen had been carefully washed; the old labels, faded out of all legibility, were replaced by new ones, printed in bold black letters.

The books—Mr. Chanter came to a halt before one of the glazed bookcases.

"Ha!" he said. "It is some time since I have examined these books! There seem scarcely so many as—eh? as I seem to recall!"

He looked over his spectacles at young Timothy, who blushed as bright as his chintz poppies. If Mr. Chanter had happened to glance at his daughter, he would have seen that she was blushing too.

"We—I—" Timothy faltered: "that is—there seemed to be a good deal of dead wood in the library! I thought it might be well to make a new start, laying in a stock of the best modern fiction, and keeping only standard works among the old. I doubt whether any one is likely to read Mrs. Southworth, for instance, or Peter Parley; I have ordered Scott and Dickens——"

"Ah! as modern fiction?" Mr. Chanter peered over his spectacles with a benevolent twinkle.

"They're new to me!" said Timothy, with another blush, which became him singularly. "I don't believe many fellows read 'em nowadays, do you, sir? I mean fellows like me! I got hold of 'Kenilworth' last night, and, honestly, it's great! Of course they are all in the Public Library, but I thought by and by I might get some of the fellows in here evenings, and read to 'em, and then we could chin a bit, and—I don't know how it looks to you, sir, but I'd like to try it."

He looked anxiously at Mr. Chanter.

"My dear boy," said the minister, holding out his hand, "as your generation says, 'Shake!' Your idea is delightful, and I shall beg that my son Aristides may

be allowed to attend your meetings. It is just what he needs. What other authors does your list include?"

Timothy promptly named half a dozen authors of the day; Mr. Chanter nodded thoughtfully.

"Excellent!" he said. "Excellent! But, my young friend—all this means considerable outlay; have you thought of that?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I ought to have said, Uncle Gustine gave me a check; of course, I couldn't have done it without that. I haven't spent it all yet, either!" he added, with another shy, eager glance toward Lina. "I thought—I thought we might have a Ladies' Afternoon once in a while, Miss Chanter; say once a month or so! a cup of tea—here's this nice little fireplace, you see, with a hob for the kettle and all; do you think——?"

There was only a slight tremor in his voice, though all the time he was saying to himself: "Brazen cheek! will she see through it and set me down for a cad?" And all the time Lina was saying to herself, "What a lovely thing to think of! how pleasant he is! what a delightful voice he has!"

Well! well! these things happen, when eyes are bright and blood flows swiftly.

CHAPTER V

THE CHANTERS

THE Reverend Timothy Chanter and his family lived in what young Cyrus called the Chantery, and mature Cyrus the parsonage: a rambling, shabby, comfortable house, with a garden round it and an orchard behind. Its shabbiness was a constant source of annoyance to mature Cyrus. Its own houses were trim and well appointed, bespeaking thrift and prosperity; to have the parsonage shabby was a reflection on the Parish and the Village. But the Reverend Timothy Chanter, though the most amiable of men, was in some respects very difficult to deal with. He was of the Pelican breed. He liked the burnt piece of mutton, the smallest piece of cake, the cold corner of the room in winter, the hot corner in summer. His family called him openly "Pelican Pa," and delighted in circumventing or outwitting him, manœuvring a piece of the breast of the infrequent chicken on to his plate, and appropriating the drumsticks under his very nose: but the Parish found his methods baffling and unsatisfactory. When, as had happened many times, a sum of money was voted for repairs on the parsonage, the minister would receive it with hearty and grateful thanks.

"*So* good of you!" he would say. "We do appreciate all this kindness!"

He would then promptly spend the money for the benefit of some one else. "Oh, yes!" he would say,

when questioned by an exasperated deacon. "You see, Brother Hanks, those cottages down by the river were in a bad way: the dampness, you know; two or three of the old people were really suffering from rheumatism and kindred ailments. Old Mrs. Hutchins —you know her quaint way of expressing herself— said, 'The damp comes through the floor and catches me by the leg: I'd have to be a frog itself to stand it!' Now, thanks to the generosity of the Parish, the cottages are all in first-rate condition, and I am sure the old people will follow suit."

"But the Parish ain't responsible for them cottages, Elder," Abram Hanks remonstrated. "Nor the folks ain't none of our cong-gation neither. They never set foot——"

"They are human beings, Brother Hanks, and not frogs. I am sure you will agree to that!" responded Mr. Chanter gently.

"And that was every word he would say about it!" cried the aggrieved Abram. "If you ask me, I think he is the limit!"

Again, it was the front stair carpet in the Chantery, which was really *not fit,* Mrs. Judge Peters declared. Something *must* be done about it! So the Ladies' Society held a sale and a supper, such as Cyrus alone can hold, and a neat little sum in a neat little purse was presented to the minister, with "For a New Stair Carpet" plainly written on a card. No way out of that, the Ladies' Society flattered itself. But at the very next meeting, here were both Mr. and Mrs. Chanter (for she was no better than he, not one scrap!) with shining faces of joy, telling how "that poor young girl over on Elm Hill" proved to have

tuberculosis, and the doctor said she *must* go to a warm climate.

"Her people had nothing, of course; and we were wondering what we *should* do, when you dear people gave us that wonderful purse. I think we were rather clever: it was Lina's idea!" Mrs. Chanter was speaking now. "Mr. Chanter wrote on the card, under the other words, 'for the stairway of health!' 'A new stair carpet for the stairway of health.' You see? The family is rather proud, and we thought putting it in that way, something like a joke, might keep their feelings from being hurt. They took it very nicely, and she started for Florida yesterday, *so* happy!"

"And—" Mr. Chanter chimed in joyously. "You must let me tell the rest, Sue! Susan said, 'But the ladies are right, the stair carpet will *not* do as it is. Everybody assemble at seven o'clock with needle, thread and thimble!' So we had a Bee in the back kitchen, and we mended that carpet—I had given it a good beating first, that is, as good as it would stand —till now, I declare, ladies, it is a Monument of Art! We had a Welsh rarebit afterward, to celebrate. It was a great occasion!"

"But—" gasped somebody, "Elm Hill isn't in Cyrus at all, Mr. Chanter; it's in Tupham!"

"I know!" said Mr. Chanter. "Tupham is so straggling, I suppose it hardly knows where it begins or ends. You must all come and see our Monument of Art!"

"All come to tea to-morrow!" said his wife.

The house, with all its faults, was as comfortable as an old shoe, which it somehow resembled. Here the little Chanters had grown or tumbled up, a rosy,

happy, shouting brood. Two of them, Bobby, the eldest son, Nelly, the second daughter, were now married and settled elsewhere. Rodney was in college; remained at home Lina, Zephine, and Aristides, commonly known as "Sty." Most of the children resembled their father, and were rosy and fair, with round blue eyes and an expression of pleased surprise. None of them, possibly, looked quite so like a middle-aged cherub; but "give them time!" as their mother said. Only Lina and Rodney had inherited a far-off strain of Spanish blood (known in the family as the Pirate Doom), which gave them their dusky, exotic beauty, and a certain grace which was all their own. Ah, Rodney! flutterer of hearts, you do not come into this story at all; but I know how the girls felt when they saw you coming along the street.

Mrs. Chanter always maintained that of herself there was simply nothing to say. "You may put on my tombstone, 'She Meant Well!'" she would remark. "That is all there is!" Indeed, her family was apt to reply, there was not much to say, she being the deceitful and underhand person she was. Beyond keeping them all alive and happy and together, and preventing Pa from killing himself, and "running" the Parish and half the village, of course she did not do anything: the making and mending was all a pretence, as every one knew; when their backs were turned, she read French novels with her feet up on the sofa.

"I have one in the table drawer this minute!" said Mrs. Chanter demurely. "I'll read it, too, some day!"

"My dear," said the Reverend Timothy one evening, "I thought it would be a good plan to ask young

Tenterden to supper. He seems a very nice fellow, and I am sure he will be an acquisition."

"Delighted!" responded Mrs. Chanter cheerfully. "Any night but to-night."

"Any but to-night? What's the matter with to-night?"

"Cereal supper. The young man is probably used to heartier fare than we have on Wednesday evening."

"To be sure! To be sure!" said Mr. Chanter, rubbing his hands through his hair thoughtfully. "Now that seems unfortunate, for as a matter of fact, he is washing his hands at this moment in the back pantry."

"Oh!" Mrs. Chanter also was thoughtful for a moment. "Never mind!" she said brightly. "If he is used to the fat of the land, it'll do him good to find that he can have plenty of supper without it. I am sure we are all glad to see him."

Mrs. Chanter certainly had no cause for uneasiness, as she looked round her supper table ten minutes later. True, there was no *pièce de résistance,* no smoking viands, or elaborate salads; but the loaves of bread, white and brown, on the ample platter with its wheat-sheaf carving, the great "bulrush" jug of creamy milk, the wedge of cheese, the pots of jam and marmalade, certainly seemed to promise provision enough. Moreover in came Lina at this moment, bringing a heaped-up platter of shredded wheat biscuit, fresh from the oven. Tim Tenterden sprang up to take it from her.

"Oh, I say!" he cried. "Please let me take it, Miss Chanter. Oh, I say, how jolly! Excuse me, Mrs. Chanter," he added, as he placed the dish before

her, "but you know really—if you don't mind my saying it—I never saw such a jolly supper in my life!"

Mrs. Chanter smiled demurely.

"I was wondering how you would like it," she said. "I thought you might be expecting beefsteak and fried oysters, and we don't have those on Wednesday evening—or on any other, to tell the truth!"

"This is my favorite kind of supper!" The young man surveyed the table with shining eyes. "Mother and I always had it once a week. Friday was our evening. We had chowder in the middle of the day, and these things at night. I hope you won't think you have invited a wolf to supper, Mrs. Chanter!"

"A good appetite," said the Reverend Timothy, "is one of the most fortunate possessions of life. I am delighted to see that you possess it, my young namesake. By the way, what an excellent thing we are both named Timothy! If we were named Nicholas now, or Harry, it would be unfortunate; for me, at least, I being the elder. Old Nick, or Old Harry, would hardly be suitable for one of my cloth. Sue, my dear, Mr. Tenterden has no cheese. Aristides, cut another slice of bread!"

It was a merry meal. Nothing specially clever was said, but somehow they were all bubbling with pleasant talk. Tim thought he had never seen so delightful a family. His bright eyes roved from one to another. The minister, his round, rosy face shining with good will—but they all were that—Mrs. Chanter, plump and partridgelike in the trimness of her figure and the neatness of her brown cashmere dress, the very spirit of benevolent hospitality; next to her Aristides, a lad of sixteen, very conscious of his arms and legs and his

frequent blushes; next to him again, Zephine, who was certainly a pretty girl, Tim thought, but somehow his eyes never could rest on her. They would stray to the other side of the table, where Lina presided over the jam pots. Apparently it was possible for some people—for one person at least—to grow more and more beautiful from day to day. Of course he had realized the very first time, when she had greeted him so kindly on her first visit to the back shop after he had taken possession of it, that she was not only the loveliest girl he had ever seen, but that there was something about her different from all other girls, something like velvet, or rose leaves, or—or—he didn't know what. Her voice was like velvet, too, with a rich contralto note in it that he felt somehow must be like a nightingale, a bird of which he had little knowledge. She was dressed exactly right, too; no fussy things; Tim hated fussy things. Just that soft white thing round her neck, and the white ruffled cuffs that set off the slender wrist and the little hand. A beautiful hand——

"Do have another hay bale, Mr. Tenterden!"

Tim started and blushed hotly.

"Yes, please, Mrs. Chanter. What—what did you call them, might I ask?"

"Hay bales. We have always called them that, I don't know why."

"Yes!" said Aristides, "Lina was ordering some the other day from the store, and when she asked for a package of hay bales, old Adams nearly dropped his sugar scoop."

Lina laughed. What a delicious laugh! Tim had never heard a laugh in the least like it.

"I couldn't imagine why he looked so astonished. I repeated, 'Hay bales, please. I think I'll take two packages!' and Mr. Adams said, 'Be you crazy, Lina, or be I?' Then we had a great laugh together."

The Chanters were observing their guest with no less friendly consideration than his own. What a pleasant fellow! There was something very taking about his boyish eagerness, his evident delight in everything about him. He blushed, too, so easily, almost as easily as Sty. Lina, under her long lashes, took quiet note of him as his eyes wandered now and then about the room; the dear shabby dining room! Some people would have thought it too shabby. The curtains were faded almost out of existence, she thought. The leg of the table was patently mended. The laths nailed across that great patch from which the ceiling had fallen were certainly conspicuous, but how clever it was of Pa to mend it so neatly! It was perfectly safe, now, till next spring, when Judge Peters was quite sure that the vestry would be able to give them a new ceiling. The Judge had confided this to her privately, and told her that the money was to be put into her hands.

"Let it—a—be a surprise to your good father!" said the Judge. "Send him and your mother off for a holiday, Lina, and put it through while they are gone. It—it isn't safe, you know!"

Lina had nodded comprehension. Dear Pa! Angel Pa! Yes, it should be done, she had assured the Judge.

Then perhaps they could have new curtains, too. She and Zeph could make them. In the meantime, these were perfectly clean. The table might be imper-

fect, but there was nothing the matter with its polish, and——

"I say!" exclaimed Tim Tenterden, "isn't this the jolliest room that ever was! I have said that two or three times since I came to Cyrus, Mrs. Chanter, but I do think this takes the cake, honestly I do."

His eyes roved delightedly round, dwelling not on the lath-repaired ceiling, the patently-mended table-leg, but on the tall dresser with its shining pewter and brass, on the cavernous fireplace where cranes and kettles hung sedately as they had hung for a hundred years, on the white wainscoting and the rough red plaster above it: coming back at last to dwell on the shining table with its homely, comfortable fare, its gay flowers, and over it, opposite him, as if she were really a creature of flesh and blood and not a fairy vision——

"I certainly think this takes the cake!" he repeated.

"It's a comfortable room," said Mrs. Chanter, with her motherly smile. "I am glad you like it. Some time you must bring your mother to have supper with us, Mr. Tenterden. I was so glad to meet her the other day."

"Oh, may I?" cried Tim. "That would be perfectly great! Mother would like it no end. We like just the same things, mother and I. We've always been together, you know, and I'm the only one. It's more as if we were chums, mother and I."

The whole family was smiling upon him now. They were sure to like the mother of such a son.

And now the pleasant, friendly meal was over. With a kindly nod and smile, the two elders prepared

to leave the room. The girls, with their brother, began to clear the table, quickly and deftly.

"Will you join us in the parlor, Mr. Tenterden?" said Mr. Chanter, with a gesture of invitation.

Tim hesitated. Might he? Dared he?

"I do hope you won't think I'm butting in, Mrs. Chanter," he said. *"Please* don't think I'm butting in! I wouldn't for anything. Only if there are any dishes, or anything of that sort, I would so love to help. Mother and I always washed the dishes together. May I?"

It was at Lina that Tim was looking now. Lina glanced at her mother, and then nodded a friendly acquiescence.

"Of course!" she said. "We shall be delighted. I will wash, and the rest of you shall wipe."

"Yes, I think so!" cried Tim Tenterden. "I think I see you washing, Miss Chanter, and me fooling round with a dish towel! I want you to know that I am a prize dishwasher, and I'll bet a hat I'll keep up with the three of you!"

In the sitting room, in their shabby comfortable armchairs, on either side of the fire, Mr. and Mrs. Chanter listened, well pleased, to the merry voices that came from the pantry. They could not hear the words, but that was not necessary. The tone was quite enough, and the happy laughter that punctuated the fragments of talk.

"Pleasant voice the young fellow has!" said Mrs. Chanter.

"That's what struck me first about him," her husband replied. "I always go a good deal by a man's

voice. I don't like a man with a rasp, nor a whine. This young fellow's voice, and the straightforward look of his eyes attracted me at once. I think he is a good fellow. I like his mother, too. Seems a nice, steady, sensible sort of woman. Brought the boy up entirely. Father died when he was five years old."

"I must call on Mrs. Tenterden," Mrs. Chanter considered thoughtfully a large hole in the heel of the sock she was holding. "Timothy, how *do* you wear out your heels? It really seems as if you must scrub around on them!"

"Scrub, my dear? No, I don't think I scrub. I'll try to walk on my toes, however, if that would be better. Anything to oblige. Hark! they're singing."

Both listened in silence. The two girls began, Zephine's sweet, rather reedy soprano seconded by Lina's rich, velvety contralto. They were singing one of the old rounds in which they delighted, "Christ Church Bells." Now Aristides joined in, and then a fourth voice, at which the minister and his wife, both full of music to their finger-tips, pricked up their ears. The young guest was merely humming at first, evidently trying out the air, following Aristides's rather uncertain lead. (Sty's voice was not quite settled yet in its baritone quality and made occasional crowing excursions into the falsetto, disturbing alike to him and his auditors.) But now at last the new voice was sure of itself and broke out, full and clear.

"Great Tom is cast!
And Christ Church bells ring one, two, three, four, five;
Six! And Tom comes last."

Mrs. Chanter and her husband exchanged glances. "My dear!" she breathed. "A tenor! This is really too good to be true!"

The voices rang on and on; more rounds, "Jane Glover," "A Southerly Wind," and other old favorites, familiar to her children from their cradles, evidently new and delightful to young Tenterden. Now came a somewhat prolonged murmur of voices, three urgent, soliciting, one protesting. Then a moment's silence, and the tenor voice broke out alone in a wild, sweet air that seemed to bring with it the breath of river and tree and wind-swept prairie.

"Oh, Shenandoah, where is thy daughter?
Oho! the rolling river!
Oh, Shenandoah, where is thy daughter?
Oho! far away,
On the wide Missouri!"

"I must certainly call on Mrs. Tenterden to-morrow!" said Mrs. Chanter, when the song was over.

A few moments more, and the young people came in, radiant and chattering.

"Aha!" said the minister, rubbing his hands. "You have given us a concert. Very enjoyable! very enjoyable indeed!"

"Oh, pa! did you hear?" cried Zephine. "He has a tenor voice!"

"Did we hear!" said Mr. and Mrs. Chanter. "I think we did!"

"And we think," said Mr. Chanter gently, "—at least we hope—that we know where Mr. Tenterden will be next Sunday morning!"

Tim and Lina exchanged glances.

"I said to Mr. Tenterden," she said, "that we were woefully in need of a tenor in the choir, and he said——"

"Oh," cried Tim, "if I only could, Mr. Chanter, why of course I'd be perfectly delighted. I'd rather sing than eat my supper any day—even such a supper as I have had to-night!" he added, laughing.

"Yes!" said Mr. Chanter dreamily, "and if you feel any self-distrust, young man, you might ask Mr. Abram Hanks to sing you a tenor solo. Poor Abram!" he added gently, "he may not take it very well; but at sixty-five a man should be brought to realize that youth is no longer in his possession. I shall call upon Abram to-morrow. And now, Mr. Tenterden," he added cheerfully, "how about a pipe? Will you join me in one?"

Now if the truth must be confessed, Tim had been thinking a little about a pipe. It was his custom to smoke one after supper; but he had been saying to himself that no one except a hobo of the vilest description would think for an instant of smoking in the presence of this lady—of these ladies! he had corrected his thoughts, with a glance at Zephine. Now, however, things assumed a different look. It was the custom of the house. Here, actually, here was the most beautiful and desirable of human beings filling her father's pipe for him, stuffing the tobacco in with that adorable little rosy finger, offering it to him with a smile which, it was quite evident, any one would gladly have cut himself into fiddle strings, served himself up on toast, to win. After all, was it not fitting

to offer incense to divinity, wherever one came upon it, and what incense could be more delightful——

"Thank you very much, sir," said Tim. "If Mrs. Chanter and the young ladies have no objection—I have my pipe in my pocket!"

CHAPTER VI

LILA LAUGHTER

RAT-TAT-TAT! a triple knock! Squire Tertius Quint looked up in angry amazement from his Montaigne. Who—*who,* knowing his habits and his principles, ventured to knock thrice at his door? Possibly it was a stranger: if so, one without breeding, who should be taught his place.

Very tall and erect was the Squire's figure, very austere, not to say grim, his aspect, as he opened the door; three inches first, for purposes of investigation; then, on perceiving the flutter of a petticoat, somewhat wider.

A tall woman stood on the doorstep, a woman gayly dressed, with a general effect of flow and flutter in her garments, of glow and glitter in her countenance, which owed much to art as well as to nature. Her eyes were dark; bright as the Squire's own, and of much the same color: a pair of dark, finely arched eyebrows surmounted them, and were surmounted in turn by a mass of golden hair.

For an instant the two glances crossed swords; then the lady began to laugh, a curious, high-pitched, musical laugh.

"I guess you're Squire Quint all right!" she said. "There couldn't be two of the kind! Going to let me in? They said you wouldn't!"

This thrust was two-edged. On the one hand was the unblushing effrontery of a total stranger, on the

other the unparalleled audacity of persons characterized as "they."

"My name is Quint!" the Squire bowed slightly, a bow which, while acknowledging Womanhood, seemed to protest against this example of it. "Can I be of service to you, madam? If so——"

His gesture was more an inquiry than an invitation, but the lady, putting her own construction on it, stepped briskly past him into the hall.

"Thanks!" she said; "since you are so pressing, Cousin—walk right in here, shall I?"

The lady made a motion toward the library, but Mr. Quint, recovering some part of his faculties, waved her toward the parlor with austere courtesy.

"This way, madam, if you will be so good! Permit me to offer you a seat! Perhaps you will then kindly indicate how I can serve you. I have not the honor——"

"Oh, you're going to have it all right, all right!" the newcomer announced gleefully. "Here's me card!"

She seated herself, and surveyed the Squire with frank curiosity and evident admiration.

"Say!" she exclaimed cordially. "You *are* a museum piece, aren't you? Tell you what, Cousin Tertius! you could get five hundred dollars a night in any high-class vaudeville, just to show yourself. Style, you know! my word!" She laughed merrily, and clapped her hands on her knees.

The Squire glared at her helplessly a moment, and then turned his eyes on the card she had thrust into his hand. It was a large card, highly glazed,

gilt-edged, potently perfumed; it bore the legend,

Lila Laughter

High Class Vaudeville; Individualized Acts, Songs and Dances

Formerly with People's Peerless Proscenium Players

TERMS: SPOT CASH

If Medusa had had an uncle in her own way of life, that uncle would have looked—barring differences in costume—as Squire Quint looked at that moment.

"Madam," he said at length, "there is some misapprehension. You have addressed me as—" He paused.

"Cousin Tertius!" The lady nodded joyously. "That's all right! Look again! Lila Laughter: my name! Suggests something, don't it?"

"It—does—not!" Squire Quint spoke with icy emphasis. "It suggests nothing whatever, except—" He wrinkled his finely-cut nostrils—"except an odor which—which I forbear to characterize. Perhaps you will be good enough to come to the point, madam; my time is of value—to myself, at least."

"Don't be stuffy, Cousin!" The visitor spoke with cheerful composure. "I'm coming. You haven't forgotten your cousin Eliza, who went to live in Ohio?"

She pronounced it "Ahia."

"Don't say you have forgotten her; she was awfully fond of you, used to reel off talk by the yard about you and Cousin Polly; where is Cousin Polly, by the

way? Mother said she was a little brown bird. I hope she hasn't hopped off the twig?"

Squire Quint glared again, but now a shadow of dismay crept into his look. Under the paint and powder, he became aware of a something—a turn of the head, a lift of the chin—that seemed vaguely familiar.

"My cousin, Eliza Quint," he said, "married a man by the name of Slaughter, Simon Slaughter; it is true that she lived in Ohio. I fail to perceive any connection——"

"Try!" Miss Laughter spoke encouragingly, as to a small child. "Get your gray matter to work, Cousin Tertius! Would any one keep a name like that, if they had to live by it? Just drop the 'S' from 'Slaughter' and you have 'Laughter'; that's straight, isn't it? And 'Lila' sounds better than 'E-liza,' don't it? Get on to it now? I was christened Eliza all right, and Puppa's name was Slaughter all right, but I was bound for the boards from when I was a kid, and Lila Laughter is my name. But I'm your cousin sure enough!" she added, with a nod and a wink, "and I've come to stay a spell, *if* convenient. I told the Johnny at the station to bring my trunk along: I always walk when I have a chance. Good for the health, and the figger, too, don't you know?"

She surveyed her undeniably fine figure with some complacency, then turned her eyes once more on the Squire. The old gentleman was still standing; indeed, he appeared incapable of motion. His expression might have moved some hearts to pity, but Miss Lila Laughter, after one glance, burst into a fit of laughter. She rocked to and fro in her seat; the tears ran down

her cheeks, and peal upon peal, shrill, but not unmusical, rang through the quiet house.

"You are *too* killing!" she gasped at length, wiping her eyes. "Here comes poor little Lila all the way from Ahia to see you, and you come the high-class Gorgon act and don't even shake hands with her. I tell you what! for two cents and a quarter I'd kiss you, just as you stand there; you're too perfectly killing for anything!"

With dancing eyes she made a motion as if to rise from her chair. In two strides Mr. Quint reached the door.

"Hippolyta!" he called in a dreadful voice. "Hippolyta! come!" and as Miss Polly's silk skirts whisked hurriedly along the upper corridor, he bolted into the library and shut the door.

When Miss Polly entered the parlor, the visitor was still wiping her eyes. She rose at once, and at sight of the little lady her manner changed perceptibly. She was still breezy, but the "rollick" was gone. In a few words she made herself known; Lila Laughter was her professional name, but she was christened Eliza, and she was the daughter of Eliza Quint Slaughter.

"Perfectly!" said Miss Polly. "How do you do, Eliza?" She shook hands, primly, but not uncordially. "Pray be seated. I remember your birth perfectly; I knitted some bootees for you. You are thirty-six years old. Your mother died five years ago, your father a year or so before that. Did they leave any property?"

"Know all about us, don't you?" remarked Miss Laughter, whose manner was becoming more and more subdued. "I suppose the old gent does, too, though I

froze him so stiff you couldn't get a spoon into him! Say, he's the real article, isn't he? I told him he could get five hundred dollars a night just by showing himself. No, Pa and Ma didn't leave anything to speak of. I made Ma comfortable as long as she lived. I've been on my own ever since I was twelve."

"You mean that you have supported yourself? That is creditable, Eliza! Are you a school teacher?"

Miss Laughter laughed, not quite so merrily as before. "Here's me card!" she handed it with a half-defiant air. "I began with dancing and tight-rope acts: now I'm in vaudeville."

Miss Polly took the card with the tips of her dainty fingers, and read it carefully.

"Yes!" she said. "Dear me! how very—enterprising! And what has brought you East, Eliza?"

"I was with the Players. People's Peerless, you know. They went to pieces last week, and left me stranded in this State. Ma always wanted me to look up her folks, and I thought here was me chance; and, too, there might be some opening, though I will say it's a poor public for vaudeville, what little I've seen of it. Well!" she rose from her seat. "Here comes the Johnny with me trunk. Is it stay or go? I suppose there's a hotel of sorts, though if you folks had come to Ahia—" she stopped abruptly, her voice faltering on the last word; was there—could there be a suspicion of moisture in the bold brown eyes?

Miss Polly Quint held out both little hands with a fluttering motion. "My—my dear," she said, "of course you will make us a visit; a good visit!" she added more firmly. "You must stay quite a week. I

will take you up to your room, and Michael will bring the trunk immediately. This way, if you please!"

She rustled up the wide, shallow stairs, and Miss Laughter, still subdued, rustled after her in silence.

"I shall put you here!" Miss Polly opened a door, and motioned her guest to enter. "We call this the dimity room; your mother slept here when she visited us as a girl. Oh! oh, my dear, don't! I beg of you, Eliza! Compose yourself!"

For at sight of the room, with its spotless dimity, its old mahogany, its ball fringes and homespun rugs, Miss Laughter burst into tears, and wept as heartily as she had laughed half an hour before.

"I guess—I guess I'm tuckered out!" she sobbed. "Ma told me about this room. It—it's a long ways from Ahia!"

She had no more words. How could Miss Hippolyta know that in her heart she was crying passionately, over and over.

"If she could have had this room to die in! If poor mother could only have had this room to die in!"

A long way from Ohio. It was a pity that Miss Hippolyta, or her brother, could not have traversed the way, and had speech with some people in a little mid-Western town, and have heard how little 'Liza Slaughter took care of the crippled father and the consumptive mother, "and she hardly more than an infant, as you might say. Dance and sing right in the street there, and then run round with her little hat, and laugh and say, 'Good enough? Make it a dime, son!' Oftentimes folks would make it a dollar—them as could, what I mean; and off she'd cut to the store for provisions. Yes, sir! kep' her folks off the town, that

little gal did; kep' 'em decent, and buried 'em decent, all off her own bat."

A' long way from Ohio!

"A cup of tea, if you will be so good, Samantha!" said Miss Polly to Mrs. Bullion, who now appeared on the scene, somewhat flustered, and closely followed by Michael with the trunk. "My cousin, Miss—a—Miss Eliza, has arrived, and is feeling a little overcome. The trunk stand, Michael, in the corner yonder. Thank you! that is all. Now, my dear, now! Your emotion does you credit, but do pray compose yourself!"

Miss Hippolyta Quint was, as I have said, one of the gentlest of women; so gentle, so birdlike, one's instinct was to address her in chirps instead of words. Nevertheless, a valiant heart beat in her little bosom. When, some minutes later, she left her visitor calm and refreshed, and promising to lie down like a good girl and take an hour's rest before tea, the valiant heart was beating very fast, very high up in her throat. She paused a moment at the library door, to lay her hand on the aforesaid heart, and to settle her brown silk skirt in its seemly folds; then, with a little upward look which was her unspoken prayer, she entered the room and closed the door behind her.

Squire Quint was standing by his library table; his tall figure was tense as a drawn bowstring; his dark eyes gleamed under his arched brows; one would have said his ears were cocked, were such an expression consonant with his dignity. At his sister's entrance, his eyebrows disappeared entirely under the silver waves on his forehead. He struck the table with his knuckles, lightly, yet Miss Polly winced at the sound.

"Hippolyta," he demanded, "what was that noise I heard on the stairs? It sounded like—a trunk!"

"It was a trunk, brother!" replied Miss Polly meekly. "It was Eliza's trunk. She has come to make us a little visit. Her mother, you know——"

"How—did—you—dare?" Mr. Quint's tone was low and vibrant. "How—did—you—dare do this, Hippolyta? Let the trunk be removed at once! at once, do you hear? Not another hour shall that woman remain in my house."

Miss Polly seated herself; the trembling would show less that way, and if she fainted, it would be more convenient. Her cheeks were very pink, her eyes as bright as the Squire's own.

"Her mother," she repeated, "was our own first cousin. Her grandfather, Ignatius Quint, was born in this house. It is impossible for us to refuse hospitality to his granddaughter."

Mr. Quint emitted a singular, long-drawn sound, between a whistle and a snort, which Miss Polly had heard only once or twice in her life.

"Eliza Quint renounced her name!" he said stubbornly. "She married a man by the name of—of Slaughter! Do not attempt to deny it!"

"Women usually change their names at marriage!" said Miss Polly. "I admit the name is an unfortunate one, but it was not Mr. Slaughter's own choice; he was a respectable man, I have always heard, though not prosperous in business. Brother Tertius——"

"I repudiate her!" cried the Squire, with a sweep of his arm, terminating in a rap which must really have hurt his poor knuckles. "I reject her! I—I—spew her out! Let her be removed at once!"

"No!" Miss Polly pressed her hands tight together, and tucked her feet under her. "No, brother! She must remain."

"Am I to be disobeyed in my own house?" thundered the Squire.

Miss Polly's voice was barely audible, but it was a whisper of steel.

"We inherited jointly!" she said.

There was a long silence. Mr. Quint sat down at his desk, and began to rearrange his orderly papers with fingers that trembled almost as much as those little ones clasped together in Miss Polly's lap. At length——

"You defy me, Hippolyta?" he asked in a toneless voice.

"Oh, *no,* dear brother!" The words came pouring now, soft and hurried; a rustle of soft leaves, where the hint of steel had whispered. "No, indeed! if you could know the pain it is to me to withstand you in any way! Nothing—nothing in the world except Family Duty—" she paused to dry her eyes, for the tears were brimming over now. "It will be only a week, brother!" she hurried on; "only one week: I made that quite clear. And I thought—it is near the time of your regular visit to Bronson; the new books will have come in: the weather is agreeable. I thought you might take the four o'clock train, and spend the week at the Dinosaur!" This was the Squire's club in the nearest big city. "I will give directions to Michael, and pack your bag."

She rose, still trembling: the Squire sat still. He was building a little pyramid of pens; it was very neatly done, yet his long delicate fingers still trembled.

Miss Polly hesitated a moment, then moved away; as she reached the door, Mr. Quint spoke.

"You need give no orders!" he said with dignity. "I shall remain at home. What—what assurance have you that this—that our relative will remain no longer than a week?"

"At the end of a week," said Miss Polly, "we shall begin to whitewash."

CHAPTER VII

A QUIET HOUR

THE crocus light of an early spring afternoon was streaming in at the back shop window of Bygood's, shining on a number of pleasant things. It twinkled on the copper kettle, burnished to the last point of brilliance, which was singing and simmering on the hob of the little open fireplace: it shook hands, so to speak, with the little flames, some of them, too, crocus-colored, leaping and crackling in the said fireplace. It lingered on the cyclamen blossoms, dusky yet vivid crimson, in the pot that stood on the little table, and sparkled on the cups and saucers and teaspoons beside it. It picked out the gold lettering of the books behind their glass doors, and drew a gleam from the heart of every specimen of quartz-crystal or metallic ore. (The fossils remained unresponsive, shrugging gray shoulders and intimating that sunlight was not what it had been in their youth.) Last but not least, the yellow light rested on the close-cropped brown curls of Mr. Timothy Tenterden, trying, not wholly without success, to pick out threads of gold in them.

Tim was full of happy anxiety. He hovered about his little *milieu,* touching here, retouching there, as a woman might; he had certain feminine qualities, this only son of a widowed mother. She had taught him to love pretty things, and to be deft and dainty in handling them; taught him wistfully, always with the

thought deep in her heart of the little daughter, dead in infancy, who should have learned these things, or who would not have needed to learn. But her Tim was as good as a woman, she always said.

"It *is* pretty!" he murmured. "I *do* think it's pretty. I wish she would come before the light fades!"

Ting-ling! went the shop bell. Tim hastened into the front shop, the eager smile all ready to break.

Miss Cissy Sharpe greeted him with effusion.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Tenterden? Isn't it a lovely day? I came to get a pencil. I am sure you have lots of lovely pencils. Oh, thank you!" as Tim hastily put a tray before her. "It's a particular kind I want, and I can't remember the name of it. I like them six-sided, don't you? They're not so common; there's a kind of style about them. Have you seen the last number of the 'Ladies' Domestic'? I think the serial is splendid, don't you?"

We were all sorry for Cissy. Her mother—well, we all knew Mrs. Sharpe. Cissy certainly had had a poor chance, and she certainly had improved a great deal since Kitty Lee took her in hand: but still, she, as Zephine said, was the limit in various ways. The way she "made up" to newcomers, especially if they were—well, never mind!

"This is one of the best pencils we carry!" said Tim.

Would she ever stop talking? Would she ever go?

"No, I haven't read the serial, Miss Sharpe. I don't often get time for the serials. Wouldn't you like to take this pencil home and try it? That will be quite all right. Take it home and give it a good try! Take two or three and try them! Let me do them up for you!"

"Oh, no, Mr. Tenterden! That would be too much —let me try them here. Give me a piece of paper, just a scrap, you know. Let me sit down here. Any chair—perhaps you have them in the back shop. Shall I just step in?"

"Is that Rodney Chanter on the other side of the street?" exclaimed Tim in desperation. "I didn't know he was in town."

Cissy looked and wavered.

"I believe it is. I think—I wouldn't wonder—he is probably going to our house. Thank you very much, Mr. Tenterden, I *will* take one of the pencils home and try it, and bring it back to-morrow morning and try some of the others. Thank you so much. Good-by! I'll surely be in to-morrow morning."

With a killing glance, to which the young shopkeeper replied as best he could, the lady departed. Tim Tenterden drew a long breath and blessed Rodney Chanter. Rodney was a senior at Corona now. He gleamed comet-wise from time to time on the maidens of Cyrus. He was extremely handsome, and "awfully sarcastic," not in the least like Bobby and Sty, who were dear good fellows. Rodney wasn't doing so well in his studies, to be sure, but everybody knew he could if he would. Altogether, there was explanation, if not excuse, for Cissy's sudden departure.

Tim looked after her; saw her greet the young collegian and fall into step beside him; then forgot the existence of both, as a light footfall was heard on his own doorstep.

Lina and Zephine came in together, both rosy and smiling: Zephine pretty, gay, tiptilted as to her nose, fluffy as to her hair; Lina lovely and dusky as the

cyclamen blossoms, if she had not been more like a damask rose.

"I stopped to get some buns," Zephine announced. "Lina said we would be late, and we are, but it doesn't matter, does it? I'm dying for a cup of tea, Mr. Tenterden!"

"Don't die!" said Tim. "Please don't die! My teapot would be so disappointed, if you did. This way, ladies." And he ushered them into the back shop, where—oh, kindest fate!—the crocus light was still pouring in, warm and welcoming.

Then who so happy as Timothy? Who so gay as Zephine? Who so softly radiant as Lina?

"Now we shall see how beautifully Mr. Tenterden makes tea!" she said.

"Oh, no!" cried Tim. "Honestly, I couldn't! Oh, please, Miss Chanter! I've been counting on your making it. Sit here, please! You don't mind a rocker? I thought it would be about the right height, you know. Do you like it better with a cushion? The kettle's all boiling. Here's the tea in this little canister."

"Oh, what a darling canister! What a prettiest thing, Mr. Tenterden!"

"You like it? I'm so glad! I picked it up just the other day. I found it in such a strange place, you know. I was taking a long walk, and I came to the queerest little house. It stands in a wood road, and the queerest man lives in it——"

The sisters exchanged glances.

"Savory Bite!" they cried. "He's one of our characters, Mr. Tenterden. But did he let you inside the house? He very seldom does."

"Why, yes!" Tim admitted. "He was quite friendly, after the first minute. I asked for a glass of water, you know, and he gave it to me in a cocoanut dipper, and I said it tasted better out of that than anything else. It does, because there was one at my grandfather's house, when I was a little chap. That warmed him up, you see, and we had a good talk. I saw this old canister—it's old Lowestoft, you see—in a little cupboard, and asked about it. It was his grandmother's, and no use to him, because he never drinks tea. So I made him a little offer, and he accepted, and that's all the little story, except that, if he had known who was going to use the canister, I am sure he would have asked five times as much. Strong, please, with one lump, and cream. How do you like my cups, ladies?"

The cups were pronounced charming by Lina, too sweet for anything by Zephine.

"You never bought these in Cyrus!" exclaimed the latter. "These came from the city, I know."

Tim's face lightened with a glow that was pleasant to see.

"They came from my dear good mother!" he said. "They were part of her grandmother's wedding china. She brought them with her and insisted on my having them here. This is my second tea party, young ladies. Mother and I had the first yesterday, just our two selves, as I wanted her to see that everything was right, and besides——"

Lina gave him a very sweet look of comprehension.

"I don't think you need to explain, Mr. Tenterden," she said. "I think that must have been a lovely tea

party. Some time—some time perhaps you will let us come again, when your mother is here."

"Oh, do!" cried Zephine. "She is too perfectly sweet for anything. I do love her hair so, Mr. Tenterden. It is just as bright as these spoons, I declare. Are the spoons hers, too?"

"Yes, the spoons are hers. Everything good that I have is hers," said Tim simply. "You've got a lovely mother, too, Miss Chanter."

"Oh, I hope Mrs. Tenterden likes Cyrus!" said Lina softly. "I hope she means to stay here with us."

"Indeed she does!" cried the young fellow, his face glowing. "She thinks it is the nicest place in the world, and so do I. We're full of plans, mother and I, and every one of them is laid in Cyrus. May I have another cup, Miss Chanter? Might I say 'Miss Lina' and 'Miss Zephine,' so as to mark the difference, you know?"

"I think it is a pity you don't know the difference!" said Zephine demurely.

Then there was a great laugh, and another cup of tea all round, and much praise of the wonderful cookies which Aunt Emmeline had sent with her compliments.

"She's a dear, too!" said Zephine. "She's too cute for anything, and as for him, he's a perfect old darling, and so generous!"

Tim chimed in heartily. Uncle Gustine was generous indeed. If they had finished their tea, the ladies must see all the wonderful books that he had sent. See! Here was this great box just opened to-day. Tim was most anxious to look them over with Miss Lina. As he began to take out the books with eager

hands, Zephine rose, declaring that she had an errand for her mother.

"If I don't bring a yeast cake, there will be *no* breakfast to-morrow!" she announced. "I'll come back for you, Lina. You'll just have time to go over some of those wonderful books. Good luck to you!" she nodded gaily and departed.

"I'm not quite a fool!" said Zephine to herself. "Besides I know they'll be talking about poetry, which I cannot abide."

The crocus light was fading fast, but a gleam of it still rested softly on the two heads bent together over the books.

"I laid in some poetry this time, Miss Lina," Tim was saying. "You know it's the strangest thing, but when I was a little chap, I never could read poetry. It seemed to me just nonsense, you know, rubbish, and all that, and now, why, it seems as though I couldn't get enough of it. Mother used to read me Longfellow and Tennyson, and of course I liked them because she read them, but there are others. Did you ever read anything by Browning, Robert Browning?"

"Yes," said Lina, gently. "I am very fond of Browning."

"Well, honestly, isn't he great? I never heard of him, you know. You might just as well know at once, Miss Lina, that I'm dreadfully ignorant! You see, I never had much time for books outside of school, and, as I said, I didn't care about poetry. It seemed as if I ought to be studying things like chemistry, you know, and geometry, things that would be getting me somewhere. Don't you see? But now—the world grows so much larger, doesn't it? It is as if doors

were opening everywhere. Why, Browning—he's such a great big door, isn't he? Do you know that one about riding?"

"'As I ride, as I ride,'" quoted Lina, in her soft voice.

"That's it! that's it!" cried Tim. "Well, it makes you feel as if you were riding, doesn't it?"

> "'How the tide rocks my side,
> As I ride, as I ride.'

Here!" and he turned the leaves with trembling fingers. "Do you mind if I read it?"

Ah, pleasant hour! The light fading, the kettle murmuring softly, the boy—in some ways he was only a boy—reading with stumbling eagerness, with imperfect emphasis, but still with a fire of understanding and admiration, the lines to which generations of boys have thrilled; the girl all glowing with soft responsiveness, with eager admiration of the well-known music, with delight at finding another lover of it. A happy and pleasant hour, all too brief.

"Here I am!" cried a gay voice, "Yeast cake and all! Come along, Lina, or we shall be late for supper. I know what you have been doing, you two! You have been reading poetry. Browning—oh, my stars! how glad I am I had to get a yeast cake! I do think he's the limit! Good night, Mr. Tenterden! We've had a lovely time."

"Good night, Mr. Tenterden!" said Lina, holding out her little hand. "It has been perfectly delightful, and—and we shall be very glad to come again, thank you. And thank you for reading!" she added gently.

"It has been a very great pleasure, and I am glad that you love my Browning."

Tim Tenterden watched the sisters as they went down the Street, arm in arm. Zephine was a pretty girl, he thought; a nice girl, too. He was silent for a moment, and then began to murmur certain lines.

"'Where I find her not, beauties vanish;
Whither I follow her, beauties flee.
Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
June's twice June since she breathed it with me?'"

But it was not of Zephine that Timothy Tenterden was thinking at that moment.

CHAPTER VIII

"A LITTLE MORE THAN KIN AND LESS THAN KIND"

BY supper time Miss Laughter (I give her the name of her choice!) had recovered her composure, and even something of her hilarity. At least, when on entering the dining room she saw Mr. Quint's face, glaring in petrified austerity over the back of his chair (he had remained standing, watch in hand, since the bell rang some five minutes before), her impulse was to say something that would intensify the glare. The fitting words actually trembled on her tongue. "Take a drop of something hot before you freeze solid!" She opened her lips—but, after a glance at Miss Hippolyta, closed them again. It was as if the little lady's hand had been laid on those ruddy lips. What she did say, to her own great surprise, was "Sorry I'm late, Cousin 'Polyta. Couldn't fasten me frock, you know."

It was an excellent supper; the visitor had a healthy appetite, and did ample justice to the creamed chicken and all the other good things; but as a social occasion, it could not be called a success. The Squire maintained a stony silence; Miss Polly chirped a series of inquiries about "your poor mother," which Miss Laughter answered as briefly as might be.

"'Spose I tell you about it some other time!" she said finally. "I'd like to ask a few questions meself, don't you know? What have you got here in the way

of a hall, Cousin Polly? Not much in your line, but Cousin Tertius seems to have gone out of the talking-machine business altogether. Where do your traveling companies show up?"

Miss Polly considered.

"Travelers go to the Mallow House," she said. "It is an excellent hotel, kept by Mr. Marshall Mallow, a person of whom we all think highly. As to a hall—do you mean for speakers, Eliza?"

"Shows! Vaudeville, variety, special features; like on me card, you know. Where's the best chance for little Lila to show off? I've got some dandy acts, I can tell you; make you sit up without swallowing the poker!" she added with a mischievous glance at the Squire.

That gentleman opened his mouth to speak, but Miss Polly rustled into the breach in a soft flurry of speech.

"There is no hall in Cyrus! Entertainments—of a select character—are occasionally given in the church parlors. We—that is to say, friends of ours—presented Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works some years ago, for the benefit of a charity. It was a pronounced success. My brother"—with a look of gentle pride—"appeared as the Father of his Country."

"He would, you know!" commented Miss Laughter; adding inwardly, "Jarley's Waxworks! gee whiz! Noah's first show in the Ark!"

"Church parlors don't sound exactly my style," she said cheerfully, "but we'll have to see what we can do. How is your gospel shark? All cast-iron, or is there some give to him?"

Looking at Miss Polly, she met a look of such

blank incomprehension, that she—to use her own expression—backed down for another start.

"Your parson!" she said: "minister: sky pilot: is he stiff, or can you bend him?"

"Mr. Chanter is a man of liberal thought," began Miss Hippolyta, but paused; her brother rose from his chair with a snap as of an opening jackknife.

"I think we will not discuss our pastor!" he said briefly. "Cousin Eliza—Sister Hippolyta—if you will excuse me! it is seven o'clock."

He stalked majestically out of the room, and the library door was heard to close behind him. Miss Laughter laughed merrily.

"Isn't he too cute for anything?" she cried. "Honestly, I never saw such a get-up in my life; and never drops his character for a single wink. I'd give my new hat to get him into vaudeville. S'pose there's any chance, Cousin Polly? Now, don't *you* try to glare, because it isn't your line, not the least scrap. Come on, and let's be cozy somewhere! Your line is adorable too. I love it! Think I could get it up?"

Long and anxiously did Miss Hippolyta Quint ponder in the quiet of her room the situation before her. She had spent a harassed evening with her guest in her private sitting-room. Miss Laughter, relieved of the Squire's presence and heartened by her excellent supper, was in high spirits; her laughter pealed and trilled irrepressibly through the house! She laughed *àprôpos* of anything or nothing, and at every peal Miss Polly winced, thinking of her brother, waiting for—ah! there it was! The library door opened.

"Hippolyta!"

"Yes, brother!" Miss Polly rustled softly to answer

the curt summons. "What—what is it, Brother Tertius?"

"I am disturbed!"

"I am sorry, brother! I will see to it!"

Returning, she closed the sitting-room door, and turned an anxious face on her guest.

"My dear Eliza," she said gently, "I must ask you not to laugh quite so loud; it disturbs my brother, who is at his studies."

Miss Laughter stared. "What's wrong with me laugh?" she asked. "'Me laugh is me fortune, sir, she said.' I have to keep in practice, don't you know? I'd lose me octave if I didn't practise."

"Your octave?" repeated Miss Polly, vaguely.

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! the octave, don't you see? Then there's me trill; that fetches 'em even more. Ha-ha-ha-ha! pretty, what? silver bells! Wait a jiff!"

She fumbled in her bag and brought out a bundle of newspaper clippings. "See what the *Comet* says; the *Comet* chap has an ear for a laugh. 'Silver bells at sunset; birdsongs at dawn; scintillating sparkles of starry sound; these but palely indicate the trill of Lila Laughter.' I tell you! that's the stuff."

She winked deliberately at her hostess, and replaced the clippings. "You shall have more of 'em to-morrow!" she promised. "Now, if you won't be lonesome without me, I'd like mighty well to be out of me stays and into me painwore. I've been traveling since morning, and you know how it is."

Long and anxiously Miss Polly pondered. What to do? How *could* Brother Tertius endure a whole week of this? If he would only go up to town! Perhaps she might still persuade him—the chiseled flint of his

countenance rose before her, and she dismissed the thought. Then there was nothing for it but to keep Eliza out of the house as much as possible. She would take her to walk; the shops would interest her; Messrs. Jebus had a really beautiful display this week. Mrs. Chanter was so kind, perhaps she would ask her to tea at the parsonage; there were the Tooths——

Miss Hippolyta started, and raised her head. Her delicate nostrils dilated; a strange odor was stealing into them. Tobacco! not the warm mellow fragrance of the Squire's cheroot—besides, he would never think of smoking upstairs; this was an acrid smell, with something heavy in it, as if a perfume, not of the most ethereal, had been mingled with the leaf.

Miss Hippolyta stole softly to her door and sniffed again. Yes! no doubt about it. The odor came from Eliza's room, the door of which had been left on the jar (mystic phrase!) because the fire burned better so. Summoning all her gentle dignity (there were some things that could *not* be allowed in a gentlewoman's household) the little lady stepped to the door of the guest's room—and paused in blank amazement.

Some one was in the room with Eliza! at nine o'clock at night!! The old-fashioned comb-back rocking chair was drawn up before the fire, and above its back appeared a close-clipped head of dark hair, surrounded by a blue halo of smoke. Good heavens! a man!

Miss Polly's gasp of horror was clearly audible; the occupant of the chair turned round, cigarette in mouth; stared, then burst into a violent fit of laughter. Octave and trill and octave again, it rang and echoed in increasing volume. Miss Polly shut the door and leaned against it.

"Eliza!" she said, and her voice might almost have been the Squire's, "what—*what* is the meaning of this?"

"Oh, ho! ho! ho! ha! ha! ha! ha!" laughed Miss Laughter. "I have certainly come here to meet me death; or to make me fortune!" she added, wiping her eyes. "Caught me, didn't you, Cousin Polly? If I could only catch you and put you into an Act, it would be the making of me."

"Where is your—your—hair?" asked Miss Polly severely.

"Me sheveloor? Look at it on the bedpost! Those round balls are just the perfect thing, aren't they? I like myself better as I am, but you know what the Public is; they must have the style, and the style is golden just now."

Miss Hippolyta looked at the shining structure which crowned the mahogany bedpost; then at the cigarette. The former was a subject on which she could not bring herself to speak. The latter——

"You must not smoke in your bedroom, Eliza!" she said firmly. "It cannot be done!"

"Gee!" Miss Laughter looked up, surprised. "I never thought—get into the curtains, will it? I'll go downstairs; or—say! it's a lovely night; I'll go outside and finish me smoke there. You wouldn't rob little Lila of her smoke, Cousin Polly?"

She made a motion to rise, but Miss Hippolyta shook her head.

"It is nine o'clock!" she said. "The house is closed!"

"Closed? You mean locked up? At nine o'clock? Well, I can unlock it, can't I, and lock it again when I come in? Nobody will see me, at the end of the

world here, and if they did, me painwore is a beaut, don't you think?"

"Eliza"—Miss Hippolyta spoke firmly, even if her voice did tremble a little—"we must come to an understanding. My brother and I are persons of mature age, and of settled ideas and habits. Of myself I do not speak, but my brother's ideas and habits must be respected; if you are to stay with us a—a whole week, you must live as we do. If you cannot do so, we—we shall have to part!"

"Live!" cried Lila Laughter. *"Live*, you little fossil sparrow? Do you think you and Grandpa Monument are alive? Ha! ha! ha!"

The octave broke in the middle, and she began to cry.

"I wish't I was back in Ahia!" she sobbed. "I wish't I was back where folks are the same kind of alive as what I am. Oh my! oh my!"

. . . . . .

Next morning Miss Laughter was rosy and smiling and golden-haired as ever. She had had "a good solid sog of sleep," she informed her hostess, adding that she felt like a jumping jack.

"And now," she said, "I'm going out to paint the town red!"

Miss Hippolyta looked up aghast.

"To—to paint the— I do not understand you, Eliza!" she said.

"You wouldn't, you know!" Miss Laughter replied indulgently. "No more would Grandpa Monument!" she nodded towards the closed door of the library. "I'm going to see the sights, Cousin Polly. Home of me ancestors, don't you know? Tra, la, la! See you later! What time is grub?"

Informed that dinner would be on the table precisely at one o'clock, and that Mr. Quint required punctuality in attendance, she bade Miss Hippolyta not to fret her heart out about that. "You can count on Lila's tummy as you can on her heart!" the lady declared. "She never keeps it waiting a minute longer than she has to!" and she departed with a wink which almost upset the equilibrium of her "sheveloor," leaving Miss Hippolyta on the doorstep in a dazed condition.

Sauntering along the Street, Miss Laughter was a vision which could not, and did not, fail to attract the attention of Cyrus, individually and collectively. Her golden puffs and curls (both were in fashion at the time) were surmounted by a large black hat on whose wide expanse grapes, ostrich plumes and roses fought for precedence. Her costume of bright blue silk floated about her fine figure; her little shoes (she had very pretty feet and hands) were white, with gold heels three inches high. Chains, bracelets and brooches clinked and twinkled all over her. She twirled a white parasol as she walked; altogether, a strange vision for Cyrus Street. Before or after she passed, every occupant of the Street was either standing at his door or gazing from his window. The Messrs. Jebus, performing the latter act, to the peril of the embroideries displayed therein, were greeted by the lady with so knowing a wink that they retired to the back shop in speechless confusion. Mrs. Sharpe happened to be coming out of the Pharmacy as Miss Laughter passed, and tottered back in a half-fainting condition, announcing that she had seen a Jezebel from Jericho, and that nothing but a drop of peppermint cordial would enable her to pursue her way. Mr.

Tooth, his admiring gaze following the fair comedienne on her way, came very near administering tincture of ipecac, which stood beside the cordial on the shelf; Mr. Ivory Cheeseman was understood to say afterward that he wished he had done so.

Miss Laughter's keen eyes had noted the Pharmacy; had she voiced her thought she would have said, "Some dope shop; what?" She would have entered, but for the momentary glimpse of Mrs. Sharpe in the doorway.

"No cats in mine!" she murmured, and passed on.

At the door of Bygood's she came to a halt, and surveyed the shining premises with evident approval.

"This," she said, "is my size! might be Ahia!"

She entered, and walked almost into the arms of Mr. Very Jordano, who was in the act of opening the door—with a view, it must be confessed, to obtaining a nearer sight of the strange vision.

"Tut-tut-tut!" stammered Mr. Jordano, stepping backward, and relapsing in his confusion into the stutter of his boyhood, of which he had so painfully—and he thought, completely—cured himself. "Tut-tut-tut! I implore your pardon, Madam-dam-dam! Permit me—to—to—to—in short, to withdraw-taw-taw!"

As he spoke, he dodged from side to side, striving to efface himself, but in reality foiling every attempt of Miss Laughter's to pass him. Despair sat on his brow; his eyes were tragic in their appeal. The lady laughed lightly (the octave!) and taking him by the shoulders, moved him aside and stepped past him.

"Cast in your stall, weren't you?" she said cheerfully. "That's all right, son! This your shebang? It does you credit, I will say."

Mr. Jordano, the soul of veracity, hastened to disclaim.

"Oh, no, Madam-dam-dam! these premises——"

"Say, ain't you real profane!" interrupted Miss Laughter. "I don't know when I've been so sworn at; and you don't look like a Bo, either!"

She laughed merrily (the trill, this time) but seeing Mr. Jordano actually speechless with horror and anguish, checked her merriment.

"It's all right!" she assured him kindly. "I know all about it; 'I'm not toss-toss-tossicated; I've got a ped-ped-pediment in me speech!' Don't mention it! it was only me joke about swearing."

"Oh! oh, Mad—I would say Lady!" gasped Mr. Jordano. "You are too merciful! I—as you divine, I—a slight impediment—a—if you could overlook-took-took——"

"Right-o! put it in the bag! you know!" and she sang, to a gay little tune,

> "'If there's anything that brings you trouble,
> If there's anything that gives you pain:
> Why, put it in the bag with your old false teeth,
> And never take it out again!"

At this moment Timothy Tenterden, who had popped out a moment to do an errand for his mother, entered somewhat out of breath.

"Thanks awfully, Mr. Jordano!" he cried. "Awfully good of you to stand guard—oh!" perceiving the lady, he bowed low. "I beg pardon, madam! can I serve you?"

"Gentlemanly and urbane pro-pri-e-tor!" Miss

Laughter greeted him affably. "And what's the—why, bless my posters and programs, if it isn't my young friend of the Pullman car! howdy, Bo? Pleased to see you! Put it there!"

Timothy Tenterden stared a moment, then collected himself.

"Of course!" he said cordially, shaking vigorously the little hand held out to him. "How do you do? Glad to see you, Miss—a——"

The lady trilled gleefully.

"'Fess up!" she cried. "'Fess that you haven't the dimmest! *and* no wonder! I'll have to 'fess up, too. 'Member the sheveloor you picked up, just this side of Buffalo? I was in the upper berth, y'know, and it fell——"

The young man blushed scarlet.

"Oh! oh, yes!" he said hastily. "Of course! I remember perfectly! Very glad, I'm sure!"

"Not so glad as I was!" retorted Miss Laughter. "Cost me a cool hundred, that sheveloor did, and the darky just setting his great hoof on it when you whisked it out from under. *That's* the advantage of a lower berth; but I always say, 'Give me air!' I say. Well! here I am now, sheveloor and all; say we introduce all round! Here's me card!"

She produced a couple of cards from her bag and handed them to the two gentlemen, rattling on the while in her ringing, high-pitched voice.

"With the Players, you see; they went bust last week, and I found me planked on this part of the country. Always heard it was the last tip of the world's tail, and believe me, it is! But I had relatives here, and thought I'd look 'em up, and mebbe do a

bit of business at the same time. I'm in luck to meet up with you two. You—" nodding to Timothy Tenterden—"are on to me already, and you"—with a glance at Mr. Jordano—"belong on the boards yourself, eh, what? Don't tell me that cloak and moustache ain't professional, for I mightn't believe you, and then where would you be?"

Half shocked, half pleased, and all fluttered, Mr. Jordano drew his cloak about him and gave his moustache an embarrassed twirl.

"You—a—are under a misapprehension, madam!" he said. "A—a simple scribe, at your service! that is to say-tay-tay—editor of the *Cyrus Centinel,* in which I strive every week-teek-teek to—a—in short——"

"Editor! don't say a word! I *am* in luck!" The lady fumbled once more in her bag and produced the bundle of clippings. "You are me friend; you are both me friends! Here! I've marked the best one for a write-up. Do your prettiest, and I'll give you a gag in my first song. Listen! Here's what I gave the editor of the *Potterville Peek-a-Boo;* he was tickled to death, see? Made it up on my way to the performance, give you my word I did, tune and all. Here's the way it goes:

As I walked along the street, sir, the first man I saw
Was the ducky little dandy of an ed-i-tor.
He's a ducky little dandy,
And a dandy little duck,
And when he does your write-up,
You are sure in luck!

Tickled to death, he was! You never saw a man so tickled. Danced it, you understand, like this!"

Only a few steps; the front shop permitted no more; prettily enough taken, with much clicking of the gold heels and pointing of the toes; the white parasol twirled; the golden ringlets tossed and nodded, the high voice laughed and trilled. Now she paused before Timothy Tenterden and resting her hand lightly on his shoulder, pirouetted round and round him on the tips of her toes. Mr. Jordano gasped, breathless with admiration. Tim, half amused, half embarrassed, stood blushing, and smiling sheepishly. What could he do? He couldn't be rude to a lady——

"Let me be your little girl!"

sang Miss Laughter.

"I'll be your sweetheart so true:
Never, I'm sure, can I have
Another steady like you!"

Some impulse made Tim look up, still blushing, still smiling that embarrassed smile: look up, to meet the startled gaze of two dark eyes: to see in the doorway a white, scared face, the face of Lina Chanter. Before he could move or speak, it was gone.

CHAPTER IX

AT GAYLORD'S

PUNCTUALLY at six o'clock that evening Timothy Tenterden put up his shutters (I should rather say "Mr. Bygood's shutters," for did they not preserve *in perpetuo* the one witticism of that gentleman's meek life? They were white: on one appeared in large black letters the word "Buy," on the other, "Goods." It was a sorrow to Mr. Bygood that this inscription could be seen only after six o'clock).

Timothy Tenterden put the shutters up, I say, and mounting his bicycle sped away to "Gaylord's," where he and his mother were still domiciled. It was a spring evening, mild and lovely. Tim loved spring, and loved the country, but to-night he was only vaguely aware of blossoming trees and uncurling ferns. All he really saw was a white, scared face and a pair of wide, startled dark eyes. No wonder! what must she have thought? A most extraordinary—but he could explain it all in a moment. She would see, would understand, that he simply couldn't help himself.

Entering the family sitting room (not the wide hall with the great fireplace, where Russell Gaylord used to sit among his dogs, but the pleasant corner room facing south and west that Madam Gaylord had used in her time) he looked eagerly round; his face fell: yet he had a smile for his mother as he kissed her,

and responded cheerfully to Mrs. Tooth's expectation that he was "all wore out."

"Not a bit, Aunt Emmeline! not a bit! only a little out of breath: I guess I speeded just a mite on the home stretch. A'—Miss Chanter hasn't come yet? You said she was coming to supper? or—or didn't you?"

"She did come," replied Mrs. Tenterden, "but only to ask if we would excuse her. She had a bad headache, she said, and she certainly looked sick, poor child."

"She looked like death!" Mrs. Tooth chimed in with slow, melancholy unction. "That girl is consumptive, if ever I saw such. It's re'l mournful to see the young pine away, it is so: I feel for her parents, though 'tisn't as if they hadn't other children."

"Oh, come, Emmeline!" Mrs. Tenterden, rosy and cheerful, looked up, protesting, from her knitting; "you needn't put on mourning for Lina just yet. She's no more consumptive than I am. Pity if a girl can't have a headache once in a while without being buried for dead. Lina is slight-built, but so are you!"

"Slight!" Mrs. Tooth rose to the bait with ardor. "I am a bag of bones, and nothing else. I have fell away something terrible this last six months; there's not flesh enough on me to stuff a pincushion."

"I'd call it mighty poor stuffing, anyway!" Mrs. Tenterden responded. "Hark! there's Gustine. I'll tell the girl to put supper on."

"I'll tell her, mother!" said Tim, and went sadly away to wash his hands. What did he care about supper? Why was there this everlasting eating and drinking?

If he had had that afternoon cup of tea which had been promised him—that precious cup, poured by those slender hands that were so wonderful to watch, so soft to touch— But the tea had grown cold untasted. The crocus light had faded to gray. There was a touch of winter in the air. Life was a grim chore at the best.

Mr. Augustine Tooth entered, fresh and pink from his ablutions. In his dressing room, which had been remodeled, alabaster replaced the former porcelain fittings. He thought it extremely chaste. He never ceased to wonder at and admire the treasures that Mother Earth held "within her boosum." "The works of man," he was wont to say, "are wonderful; but give me the boosum of Mother Earth!"

The party was soon seated at supper round the shining mahogany table on which the new silver, the new crystal and porcelain and damask, glittered and sparkled and gleamed, each in its own way. Mr. Tooth glowed with pleasure as he looked about him. It is true that he shivered a moment at sight of a hideous little jug of pink and green frosted glass beside Mrs. Tooth's plate which struck a note of discord through the whole shining array; but his kind heart smote him for the shiver. Emmeline had given him that jug on their first wedding anniversary; he knew well what scrimpings and parings, what turnings of the already thrice-turned penny, had sweated out the dollar it cost. She had meant it for his shaving water, but had readily agreed to his suggestion that it was too "choice" for that, and it had retired to the glazed cupboard where her few meagre "dishes" perked forlornly. Now—"if I must have all this

waste going on," said Mrs. Tooth, "I might as well have *some* pleasure out of my own things."

Tim at first eyed the appetizing little supper with disfavor; didn't care for any fish, thank you; no, no fried potatoes; just a cup of tea and a bit of toast! Seeing his mother's look of alarm, he collected himself, and before his aunt's "There! what did I tell you? *He's* sickening next!" was fairly uttered, his plate was held out, with, "Well, I surely can't resist that, Aunt Em, it looks too good!"

After a good meal, which was what he chiefly needed, Master Tim began to take a more cheerful view of life. Yes, it had been a good day; not many sales, but one quite large one: Judge Peters had ordered a lot of stationery, both for office and home; a splendid order! The new books had come—his face fell again. Ah! the happy hour to which he had looked forward all day, in the back-shop parlor, over the new books with——

"Any visitors?" asked Aunt Emmeline.

Tim colored high; glanced involuntarily across the table at his uncle, and saw that he too was blushing; hesitated, and was lost.

"Any visitors?" repeated Mrs. Tooth, her nose beginning to vibrate in a curious way it had when she was inquisitive. "Any strangers, Tim? What makes you look so queer?"

"There—a—there was—one visitor!" Timothy spoke slowly, trying to choose his words. "She was—yes, she was a stranger: that is to say, she had never been here before. Had you ever seen her before, Uncle Gustine?"

Mr. Tooth started as if he had been shot.

"Oh! oh, yes, oh, yes!" he stammered. "I mean—oh, no! no! no! certainly not. Never set eyes on the lady before."

Mrs. Tooth's nose quivered like a rabbit's.

"Lady!" she repeated. "Who was she? Where did she come from? What was her name?"

"Her name?" Timothy still spoke slowly, conscious that not only his aunt's little red-brown eyes, but those kind blue ones of his mother's, were resting on him with surprise. "Her name is Laughter."

"What!" cried Mrs. Tooth.

"Laughter: Miss Lila Laughter. She is a—a—professional—singer and actress."

At this moment the neat maid entered. Amid a tense silence she changed the plates, and returned proffering apricot preserves and frosted cake.

"Set 'em down, if you'll be so good!" said Mrs. Tooth, in a tone of apology. "We'll do our own reaching!" And as the girl vanished, and in response to a look from her husband—"I can't help it, Gustine! I can't have that girl measuring every spoonful I take. Besides, I want to get to the bottom of this. *What* did you say this young woman—I presume she is young?—*what* did you say she *was?*"

"A singer!" Tim spoke out hardily now. "A concert singer, you know. She has a fine voice——"

"Have you heard her sing? Did you know her before? Do *you* know her, Susan?"

Mrs. Tenterden shook her head.

"Seems as though I had heard the name!" she said. "I might have seen it on a programme or in a paper, but I never saw her. Have some of the preserves, Tim!"

"Who told you she had a fine voice?" Mrs. Tooth persisted. "Did some of the folks come in with her?"

Timothy Tenterden was conscious of a growing irritation. Why should he be catechized in this way? He had done no harm, had simply been the victim of circumstances; cruel circumstances, which had deprived him of a pleasure to which he had looked forward all the week——

"I heard it!" he said briefly. "She—a—sang! just two or three bars, you know, mother, to show us the tune some words went to—a——"

"Us?" Mrs. Tooth was on him in an instant. "Do you mean Gustine? Gustine, did she sing to you?"

Mr. Tooth, very pink, hastened to disclaim. The lady had called at the Pharmacy to make inquiries about perfumes and—a—cosmetics. A singularly well-informed lady, it had struck him. She was familiar with all the high-priced lines of perfumery and toilet preparations.

"Amberantic! she asked for Amberantic!" (This was Mr. Tooth's own rendering of *"Ambre Antique"*) "Now, you know, there's few I ever met with had so much as heard of Amberantic. Forty dollars a bottle, you know. I never saw it, even. Of course I could—now—but I was advised against those high-priced perfumes."

"I should think so!" cried Mrs. Tooth. "Wicked, wanton waste, I call it! Did she want to *buy* it, Gustine?"

"Oh! oh, no! no! I hardly think so. Just interest, you know, in a high line of goods. Intelligent interest, that was all."

"Was she good-looking? Was she dressed fashion-

able? What did she have on?" demanded Mrs. Tooth.

Timothy Tenterden looked at his mother, who nodded and rose.

"S'pose we adjourn!" she said pleasantly. "We've all finished, and I presume likely Gladys,—or Doris! I never can remember which is her name—will be glad to get her dishes done this pleasant evening. What say?"

The gentlemen rose with alacrity. Mrs. Tooth wavered up from her seat, but lingered reluctant.

"I generally wash that jug myself!" she said. "Those girls are so careless!"

"Much better let her do it!" Mrs. Tenterden linked her arm firmly in her sister-in-law's and drew her toward the door. The lady yielded, and allowed herself to be led to her favorite chair, into which she sank with a sigh of mingled relief and regret.

"And *now*," she said, "let's get to the bottom of this! Gustine——"

But there was no Gustine. Both men had discreetly evaporated; the door was at that moment closing noiselessly.

"Now! now!" wailed Mrs. Tooth. "If that isn't for all the world like men-folks! You tell them everything you know, and more; and yet when you try to get anything out of them, behold the way they act! I am discouraged!"

"Well, Emmeline, I wouldn't be!" Mrs. Tenterden settled down comfortably to her knitting. "After all, you see, they *are* men-folks, and so will remain. I expect we'd rather have 'em so than otherwise, take it all round. One, two, purl! Those were beautiful apricots; put 'em up yourself, did you?"

"No! they are some of Sarepta Darwin's; she does make choice preserves, I will say, though her disposition is more crab-apple than anything else. But I do like to get to the bottom of a thing!" Mrs. Tooth broke out afresh. "It's one of the few satisfactions I have since I was taken from my little home. You mark my words, Susan! there is something peculiar about that young woman. Take the way those two men looked! Why, Gustine Tooth blushed up the color of a beet, and Tim but little less. Don't tell me! A man may speak as he thinks fit, but he cannot control the blood in his veins. I have been married twenty years, and——"

"If you have been married twenty years to Gustine Tooth and don't know that he is as good as apple sauce," broke in Mrs. Tenterden, "then you show less sense than I give you credit for, Emmeline. *There!* don't be foolish! See how you think this edge is going to look!"

But in her bedroom, a couple of hours later, discreetly "doing up" her handsome gray hair, Mrs. Tenterden responded eagerly to a gentle tap at her door.

"Come in, Tim! hush!" she closed the door softly. "Well, I'm dying to hear: tell me all about it!"

Tim told her, omitting nothing.

"And really, you know, mother, she was rather—well, rather the limit; for these parts, that is. Poor Aunt Em! if she was so upset by just hearing about her, I don't know *what* she'll do when she sees her. And I think Uncle Gus was quite struck, you know; dazzled is the word, perhaps. She's handsome, in that kind of way; and I'm sure she's *all right,* a good

honest sort, only not the Cyrus sort, nor yet New England. Poor old Jordano! he went quite off his nut, and began to roll out poetry about the Muses and the Graces. But—" his face fell. "Oh, mother! *she*—Miss Chanter—came to the door and saw her—saw her dancing, and went away. I couldn't help it, could I? *how* could I? But you can straighten it out, mother, can't you? Say you will, that's a dear little mother!"

Mrs. Tenterden, brush in hand, paused, reflecting.

"No doubt I could," she said finally, "and surely I would, if 'twere advisable; but you know I don't believe in meddling, Tim. Let each generation take care of itself, I always say, because no two are geared alike. It's like sewing machines; or as you would say, automobiles. Just you be patient, son, and see if things don't come round of themselves; I expect they will. If a certain person doesn't know my boy yet, why—" she paused—"why, it's time she did. But, Tim, what I want to know is, what brought this young woman here? You say she has relatives here; who are they? Did she say?"

"That's the queerest part of all!" cried Tim. "She says she is kin to old Squire Quint. She's staying at his house!"

CHAPTER X

NEIGHBORLY

THE advent of Miss Laughter was discussed that evening in every household in Cyrus, from the ample parlors of the Mallow House (where Mr. Mallow, under the impression that he was bestowing on the newcomer a choice flower of eulogy, pronounced her "a bloomerang and no mistake!") to the humble cottage where Mrs. Wibird and her neighbor, Mrs. Sharpe, exchanged gloomy prognostications as to what Cyrus was coming to.

At the parsonage, Mr. and Mrs. Chanter were talking the matter over with Judge and Mrs. Peters, who had come in for an hour's chat. Kitty and Tom being away, and Madam Flynt and Miss Croly not yet returned from Florida, the Judge and his wife found it very pleasant to spend part of an evening with these good neighbors, in the comfortable, shabby sitting room. It was wofully shabby, Mrs. Peters thought, as her unerring, though unapparent glances took in every darn in the worn rug and curtains, every ink spot on the faded chenille table cloth; and yet how cheerful and homelike!

"We ought to give them a furniture surprise party!" she said to herself. "It's a sinful shame, and I am a wicked woman."

"Not that chair, dear Mrs. Peters!" Mrs. Chanter was saying. "We have just been mending that one,

and the glue isn't dry yet. This one is quite safe, I think. Aristides, call your father, will you? Oh, no! no!" in reply to the visitors' protest. "He will surely come. He has been wishing to see you."

Mr. Chanter came in, his curly hair standing out like a pepper-and-salt halo about his head, his eyes beaming welcome.

"Well! well! well!" he said, as he shook hands. "And well-come, my good neighbors. Sit down! sit down! Sue, my dear, have you given them safe chairs?"

"Excellent, excellent!" said the Judge. "Very comfortable indeed. Well, we thought we'd look in, you know. Haven't seen you for several days. It's been a lovely day; spring coming on beautifully."

"It is indeed," Mr. Chanter assented heartily. "I was delighted to see, as I drove along to-day, that the twin-flowers are coming out in the Gaylord woods. Yes, very lovely. Now if we could have a nice, warm rain to bring things on in the gardens——"

"That is exactly what we need!" the Judge replied. "It is what we look for at this season. My tulips——"

Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Chanter exchanged glances.

"Now, my dear men," said the former, "we have not come here to talk about gardens or about twin-flowers. We are very glad spring has come, and that is all there is about that. We have come to talk about Miss Lila Laughter."

"Ah!" Mr. Chanter threw back his head, with a sigh of relief. "I confess I had hoped to come to that, Mrs. Peters. I had hoped to come to that. I was saying to Susan before supper that I was greatly feeling the need of taking counsel with you and the

Judge. This is a singular concatenation of circumstances. Have you met the lady?"

"Not yet!" said Judge Peters, cautiously. "I have seen her—but only on the other side of the street," he added hastily.

Mrs. Peters, in reply to Mrs. Chanter's inquiring glance, shook her head.

"She is coming to see me to-morrow morning. That is why I especially wanted to see you to-night. Poor dear little Polly Quint came in this afternoon in a peck of trouble. Here is this young woman, the daughter of her own first cousin, not even a stranger in her gates, for her mother was born in the house, and all that. Here she comes and sets herself down. The Squire is neither to hold nor to bind. He won't go away, and he won't do this, and he won't do that. Poor dear little Polly is almost distracted, and I don't wonder. The question is: What are we going to do about it? This girl, or woman, or whatever she is—What is she? Polly said she was coming to see you, Mr. Chanter. Let us have your impression of her, straight."

Mr. Chanter ran his fingers through his hair, laughed and blushed, and laughed again.

"My impression—" he said. "Well, my dear lady, I hardly know how to convey it to you. Miss Laughter is a wholly new proposition. A new planet has swum into my ken. I don't exactly know how to describe her. Susan can do it better than I. Susan, tell Mrs. Peters how she struck you!"

"Man," said Mrs. Chanter, "is a pusillanimous creature. I blush for you, and am glad to see that you blush for yourself. I only saw her for a moment,

Mrs. Peters. I let her in, but she didn't ask for me, so I just showed her into the study. I came from the kitchen, and she probably thought I was the domestic."

"She didn't think anything of the sort!" shouted Aristides, looking up furiously from his book.

"Stides, dear," his mother reproved him gently. "I think perhaps you and Zephine had better take your books into the study."

"Oh, now, ma!" Zephine chimed in piteously. "We've both seen her, Sty and I. We shall explode, we really shall, if you don't let us stay, and you wouldn't have us explode, you know you wouldn't."

"Let them stay, Mrs. Chanter!" said Johanna Peters, indulgently. "There is really nothing that they might not hear—I suppose!" she added, with a glance at Mr. Chanter.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, I am confident!" that gentleman replied hastily. "Whatever the—er—lady's characteristics are, I am perfectly sure that honesty and—er—good faith are among them. She struck me as a thoroughly genuine person, only her ways are not as our ways."

"I should imagine not!" said the judge, dryly. "But we have not yet heard Mrs. Chanter's description."

He bowed courteously to that lady, who took up the ball, nothing loth.

"Well, I let her in, as I said, and she certainly was a singular figure; singular, that is, for our part of the country. She was very gaily dressed in bright blue silk, with white boots and a white parasol, and a great profusion of jewelry; not, I should say, of a very costly kind. She is handsome, in a rather showy way; has extremely pretty hands and feet, of which I fancy

she is well aware. Her voice is high-pitched, but quite melodious. She has a very curious laugh. I heard her laughing, Timothy; but I think you will have to go on now, because, after all, I only saw her during the two minutes that it took to introduce her into the study. Go on!"

Mr. Chanter laughed again, with a reminiscent chuckle. He rubbed his hands slowly together and his eyes twinkled.

"She asked me first if I was the gospel shark. I replied that I supposed I came as near it as anybody she would find in this village. She then looked me over pretty thoroughly, with a very shrewd glance, and said that she imagined there was more gospel than shark about me. She said it with a pleasant look and smile, to which I could not but respond. She then gave me her card."

("I haven't got the room aired out after it yet," said Mrs. Chanter, "and I have had the windows open all the afternoon.")

"Her card," the minister went on blandly, "giving her name as Miss Lila Laughter, her profession as that of vaudeville actress and singer. She gave me to understand that she had also danced, perhaps at a somewhat earlier period. She also explained her relationship to the Quints. Being left in this part of the country by the breaking up of the company of players with which she had been traveling, she thought it a good opportunity to visit her mother's people, and also, if possible, to recoup herself by giving an exhibition, or performance, in Cyrus. It was about this last point that I wished to consult you, my dear friends. Such a programme as Miss Laughter describes would

be an entire novelty here. How it would commend itself to our people I feel quite unable to judge."

"It wouldn't do at all," said Mrs. Peters promptly. "People here don't know what vaudeville is. They do like to hear good singing, however, and I thought, to help dear Polly out of her predicament, we might get up a musicale. What do you think of that, Mrs. Chanter?"

Mrs. Chanter nodded thoughtfully.

"That might be done," she said, "not at all improperly. Were you thinking of the church parlors?"

"Well, I was!" Mrs. Peters admitted. "My parlors, you see, are hardly large enough to take in the whole of Cyrus, and we should want to get the whole, with, if possible, some people from Tinkham and Tupham, and the Corona boys. I thought that Miss What's-her-name—Laughter—you know what her real name is, don't you?"

Zephine and Aristides looked up with a jerk from the books into which their noses had been plunged, perhaps with too apparently profound an ardor.

"Her name is Eliza Slaughter."

"No!" broke from Mr. and Mrs. Chanter and the two young people simultaneously. "You don't mean it!"

Mrs. Peters nodded firmly.

"Eliza Slaughter. I knew her mother perfectly well: Eliza Quint. She was a very nice, good, rather ineffective girl. A traveling man came along, named Slaughter, fell in love with her and she with him, and carried her off to Ohio, or wherever it is they have been living. Both parents dead now. Polly thinks this younger Eliza has been a *good* girl; went on the

stage almost as a child, to help support her parents:—father was crippled for many years, and then he died; mother followed a few years ago. Polly thinks she really has had a hard time, and that she is perfectly respectable and all that, but I ask you to fancy Polly *and* the Squire shut up *à trois* with a young woman of that description. I must get her moved somewhere else as soon as may be, or I shall have Polly in hysterics and the Squire in convulsions. The Judge and I have a plan about that, which we are not quite ready to talk over at present. The question is whether you think the church parlors would be a suitable place for the sort of programme that she would give us."

The minister looked grave.

"I should have to think that over a little!" he said. "Of course, I should wish in every way to help a worthy young woman, whether she were exactly of our own stripe, or not. There is, after all, nothing criminal in white boots, or even in—er—in—er——"

"Paint and powder and a golden wig. You might as well come out with it, my dear. Even the children couldn't have helped seeing that she was made up."

The "children" looked up for an instant, caught their mother's eye with an intelligent glance, and then plunged again.

"And of course they do it a great deal in the Middle West," Mrs. Chanter added hastily, "and no doubt it may be considered perfectly good taste there, perfectly good taste. I am not attempting to condemn."

"What I am thinking," Mrs. Peters went on, "is that we might combine her with something more in our own line. Zephine and Stides could play us a duet. Your fiddle is all right, isn't it, Stides?"

Stides mumbled something to the effect that the fiddle was all right, but his playing was rot——

"*Not* that expression, if you please, Aristides!" said his mother. "Your playing is imperfect, but it seems to give pleasure. I am sure you and Zephine will be very glad to play."

When Mother Chanter spoke in that tone, her children were not in the habit of making any rejoinder. The matter was settled.

"And then," Mrs. Peters went on, with an approving glance—she did like to see a woman who knew how to manage her children!—"I thought perhaps Lina and young Tenterden would give us a vocal duet. Where is Lina, by the way? Is she coming in presently?"

Mrs. Chanter was very sorry: Lina had a headache and had gone to bed early.

"Sorry! Well, that would be all right, wouldn't it? I heard them sing together at the Ladies' Social last week, and I thought their voices harmonized most charmingly. He is certainly an acquisition, that young fellow. I think very well of Edward for having got him here. Surely Lina would do her part?"

Mrs. Chanter assented.

"And I have no doubt young Tenterden would, also. He is always obliging."

"Oh, yes! By the way," said Mr. Chanter, running his fingers through his hair again. "Miss Laughter knows young Tenterden, it appears."

Two noses were uplifted like those of hounds on the scent.

"They met somewhere. She speaks of him as her young man. She says she shall depend on him to put

her through. She must be considerably older than our young friend?"

"I should think so!" said the Judge. "Well, that will require some—er—careful handling. Johanna, my dear——"

"Yes, we must be going," said Mrs. Peters, rising. "I told Sarepta we would be in by nine o'clock."

"How are you and Sarepta getting on?" Mrs. Chanter asked, with a laugh.

"Why, capitally, on the whole. Of course, she is very conscious of the 'accommodation,' and asks every day when Mary is coming back, but on the whole we are having a very good time, and I think she is. Then I understand definitely that, if a suitable programme can be arranged, Mr. Chanter, we may have the church parlors?"

The minister assented heartily; the visitors shook hands and departed. As the door closed behind them, Mrs. Chanter turned on her lord a glance at once rueful and quizzical.

"Well, Timothy," she said, "we are in for it now."

"Yes, my dear!" Mr. Chanter assented meekly. "I suppose we are; but what else could I do? To refuse a favor to Mrs. Peters would be hardly possible."

"If Mrs. Peters were only going to be the performer!" sighed Mrs. Chanter. "I confess I dread the buzz. Cyrus is a dear place, but it does buzz so!"

"It couldn't buzz any harder than it has been buzzing all day, ma dear," said Zephine. "Mrs. Sharpe has been running up and down the Street as fast as she could go, into every store and every house; and

Mrs. Wibird thinks the end of the world is coming, and Mr. Hanks——"

"Never mind about Mr. Hanks, Zephine dear," her mother said kindly. "Suppose you go up and see how our dear Lina is. She might like a glass of orange juice, or something."

Lina did not want any orange juice. She was lying very still on her little white bed; was feeling better; didn't want anything, thank you, but Zephine was a dear to come up.

"You have had callers, haven't you?" she asked. "I thought I heard Mrs. Peters's voice."

"Yes. They asked for you, and were so sorry not to see you. They came—Lina dear, how *is* your head? Shall I go right away and leave you quiet, or do you want to hear a little bit?"

"I'd like to hear a little, only don't flounce about on the bed, darling. You might sit in the chair, if you don't mind, and you might hand me my salts. Did they come about anything special?"

"My dear, they came about this woman."

"What woman?" asked Lina, gently.

"This Miss Laughter, only her real name—Oh, Lina, her real name is Slaughter, but she calls herself Lila Laughter. Her mother was Squire Quint's own cousin, and she wants to get up a vaudeville performance here, whatever that is, and Mrs. Peters wants to tone it down into a musicale, and have it in the church parlors, and Sty and I are to play a duet, and you and Tim Tenterden are to sing one. And, oh, Lina, what do you think? She knows Tim Tenterden! She calls him her young man, and she says she expects him to

put her through! Did you ever hear anything so exciting? And how sly he has been about it! She must be ages older than he is, and her hair *is* a wig, Mrs. Peters says so!"

"Do you know, darling," said Lina, "I think I won't hear any more. You might open the window and put up the shade. I think I'll try to go to sleep. Good night, Zeph dear."

CHAPTER XI

PRELIMINARIES; AND SNUFF

MISS LILA' LAUGHTER sat in Mrs. Peters's drawing room, waiting for that lady to appear. As she sat, she twirled the handle of her closed parasol and looked about her with a keen, appraising eye.

"More high-brow!" she murmured. "My Lordy, they must roll in money, these folks. Look at that!" She took between her thumb and finger a corner of the camel's hair shawl that always lay folded on the arm of the sofa. "Look at that, will you? That would keep little Lila for six months in clover, and they use it for a slumber robe! Candlesticks!" She rose and examined the objects on the mantelpiece. "Solid silver, *of* course! Gold boxes. I do call gold boxes the limit. Wonder if this will be a second edition of Grandpa Monument!"

Hearing the door open, she hastily put the box down and turned to meet the lady of the house. A very stately figure was Mrs. Judge Peters, as she paused in the doorway a moment to survey her visitor, then advanced with a pleasant smile to greet her: a very stately lady in her brown velvet and rich lace.

"Miss Laughter," she said, "how do you do? Very good of you to come to see me. Pray sit down here on the sofa!"

"I was glad to come!" said Miss Laughter, seating herself with a bounce. "Cousin 'Polyta says you

know about things, and that you have been out of this village in the course of your life. I don't believe she has, what?"

"You are mistaken," said Mrs. Peters, dryly. "Miss Quint has traveled all over Europe, and has been, I believe, in some parts of Asia."

"My Lordy! You never can tell, can you?"

"You are right, however," said Mrs. Peters, crisply, "in thinking that I have not spent all my life in Cyrus. I am a woman of business. I did business in New York for twenty years. Let us talk frankly, Miss Laughter! What can we do for you here in Cyrus?"

Miss Laughter considered, her head a little on one side.

"This morning," she said, "I should have said you could help me to get away; but now I've kind of got my mad up, and I want to stick it for a spell. I'd like to give a vaudeville performance, Mrs. Peters, such as I've given in a good many parts of the country, mostly with a company, but sometimes on my lone. I'm not an amatoor. I know my business. Perhaps you would like to see some of my clippings."

She made a motion towards her bag, but Mrs. Peters waved the bag away with a gesture of dissent.

"I don't believe that's necessary!" she said kindly. "I have seen your name in New York. I know that you have always been with reputable companies."

Miss Laughter drew a long breath.

"That sounds good to me!" she said. "I was beginning to wonder whether I had horns and a tail; but if you've seen me name in New York, you know I'm straight. Well! what about it? Is there anything against a high-class vaudeville show here?"

Mrs. Peters was silent, considering.

"I don't quite know whether I can make you understand," she said, "how entirely out of our line, here in Cyrus, that kind of thing is."

"Oh, can't you?" said Lila. "I am staying in the house with my cousin, Tertius Quint!"

"One moment!" Mrs. Peters waved her hand. The gesture was slight, but compelling.

"I beg your pardon," said Miss Laughter. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"It really is a singular thing, when one comes to think of it," Mrs. Peters went on, "that there has never been anything of that sort here. Doubtless it will come in time, but I honestly don't think people are ready for it yet. They are very fond of music, however, and I thought, do you know, Miss Laughter, that instead of the vaudeville, we might get up a musicale, with you for the principal performer of course, but with some local talent added, to make the thing more—well, more familiar and friendly. Do you see my point?"

"I suppose I do!" Miss Laughter mused. "Sort of tone me down, what? School children's chorus, violin and cornet duet, that sort of thing?"

Mrs. Peters blushed slightly.

"Not a cornet!" she said hastily. "I can't abide a cornet. I did think of a duet for piano and violin. We have a young brother and sister who play charmingly, our pastor's son and daughter, and then——"

"Say, your pastor's all right!" Mrs. Peters pausing for a moment, Miss Laughter pressed into the breach. "He may be a holy man, but it don't do him a mite of harm. I like him first rate. He treated me white

too; said he'd see what he could do, and thought he might be able to fetch it,"

"Yes," Mrs. Peters went on smoothly, "we were talking with him last evening; my husband and I, that is, with Mr. and Mrs. Chanter. They both thought well of the idea of such a musicale as I proposed. Our idea is to hold it in the church parlors."

"Oh, Lordy!" broke in Miss Laughter, and her tone was a lamentation. "Don't put me into church parlors, Mrs. Peters! Honestly, I'm not a Sunday-school performer. I can sing all right, but what I like to do is character sketches, you know, impersonations. Here, hold on a minute! Let me show you!"

Before Mrs. Peters could voice a protest, she had whisked out of the room. There was a rattling among the sticks in the hall, the Judge's precious sticks, never to be touched by any one except himself. In another moment, Miss Laughter returned, transformed. She seemed to have grown a foot taller. One of the Judge's overcoats was buttoned about her, the collar turned up in a way that imparted a touch of austerity to her rosy face. Her chin was uplifted, her nostrils seemed to seek a purer air. She waved her walking stick with a peculiar gesture.

"I think," she said, "that we will not discuss our pastor."

After one glance, Mrs. Peters broke down and laughed until the tears came to her eyes.

"You naughty girl!" she said, "I can't have you take off the Squire. You're very clever, but I can't have you do it."

"Don't you see?" cried Miss Laughter. "It's the thing I *can* do. Hold on another minute!"

Catching up the camel's hair shawl, she vanished again, and reappeared, picking her way daintily, with tiny steps.

"My dear," she chirped, "my brother and I live in a very retired way. Our habits have been formed for many years, and we cannot have them interfered with. While you stay here, you must conform to our wishes."

Again Mrs. Peters laughed, but shook her head.

"It is very funny!" she said. "It is very funny, but it won't do here."

"Won't, eh?" Miss Laughter tossed down the shawl, and for a moment her face, which had been alight with eagerness, turned sullen. "Then I won't do here. Lord knows I don't belong here! Do what you like!" she added. "Help me to earn a few dollars in any way that will please your collection of fossils, and I'll take myself off."

"Well!" Mrs. Peters spoke very kindly, "don't take it amiss, my dear, but perhaps it is true that you don't belong here. You needn't quarrel with that. You can interest and amuse a far larger audience than that of little Cyrus. Tell me, if you don't mind, what brought you here!"

Slowly, Miss Laughter opened her bag, a little showy, foolish bag, with its clinking chains and ornaments. Slowly she drew out her purse and turned it upside down. It was empty.

"Broke!" she said. "Stone broke! My last dollar got me here."

"I see!" said Johanna Peters. "I am very sorry. Go on."

Two large bright tears brimmed over and rolled

down the actress's rosy cheeks, leaving, alas! a little furrow where they rolled. She wiped them away simply.

"The company I was with went bust!" she said. "The manager was arrested for debt, and the rest of us might go where we pleased. Ahia, where folks know me, was a long ways off; my mother was born in this place, and I knew she had relatives living. I thought maybe—" her voice faltered for a moment, "I thought maybe they would take me in and give me a lift. Well, they have taken me in!" she added, with a laugh. "But I suppose you may say I've taken them in, too. I'm not blaming them."

"But, surely, my dear, surely," Mrs. Peters' voice was very gentle now, "your cousins are the kindest people in the world. Surely they would give you money to go home to Ohio, or to set you up somewhere else, or to do anything that you needed. I am perfectly sure that you have but to ask them."

Lila Laughter's chin went up at a peculiar angle.

"I guess I'm a Quint, too!" she said. "I haven't told them, and I'm not going to."

"Bless me!" said Mrs. Peters to herself. "She *is* a Quint! It might be the Squire himself." Aloud, she added, "Of course I understand that, and respect it thoroughly. As to whether it isn't your duty to tell them, or my duty—" She paused.

"Excuse *me!* this is one woman of business to another. It's man to man, see, between us two!"

"I see!" said Mrs. Peters. "Well, then, we'll come back to business. You want to get up a paying performance, and then you want to go?"

"That's the size of it!"

"And you don't care about the church parlors. I have it. The Mallow House!"

"Aha!" said Miss Laughter, looking up. "That sounds more like it. You mean the hotel?"

"Yes, there are large parlors, and the landlord is a nice, friendly, helpful sort of man. How long do you expect to be with the Quints?"

"One week! That's what Cousin Polly said. It's what I meant when I came. I thought," she spoke slowly, "perhaps I had a right to ask that much. Mother was born in the house."

"I think you certainly had. Stay there a week, then, and after that move to the Mallow House and give your performance, with or without the young people to help, just as you like."

"Oh. I'll take 'em." Lila spoke resignedly. "I'll take 'em. Is my young man one of 'em?"

"Your young man?" repeated Johanna Peters.

"Young Tenterden, in the stationery shop. I call him mine, because I have a kind of a hold on him, d'ye see? Ask him what it is! Maybe he'll tell you. Maybe he won't. He's a nice boy, that. Then there's the old newspaper Johnny. He'll give me a good write-up, and I'll pay my hotel bill out of the proceeds. Think there'll be enough to get me home to Ahia?"

"I think there will be!" said Mrs. Peters heartily. "We'll make a try for it anyhow. And shake hands with me, my dear girl! Shake hands and let us be friends! I knew your mother very well. You mustn't make strangers of us. Your Cousin Tertius is an old man, you see, and set in his ways. When you come to

know him, he is very fine. Your cousin Polly is an angel."

"I know she is!" said Lila Laughter, "but I ain't, you see, and I don't understand the cut of her feathers!"

. . . . . .

A few days more and Cyrus was buzzing with a new sensation. We were to have an Event. There were posters in all the shop windows, announcing that on Thursday evening next, Miss Lila Laughter, late of the People's Peerless Players Company, would give a musicale in the parlors of the Mallow House, assisted by local talent. The *Centinel,* in its current issue, said:

"The denizens of Cyrus and environs are anticipating a rare treat in the forthcoming Musicale, to be held in the spacious halls of our genial Mine Host, Mr. Marshall Mallow. Metropolitan—the scribe will venture to add Nation-Wide—talent will be amply represented in the person of Miss Lila Laughter, the well-known and justly admired lyrical comedienne. Miss Laughter will be supported by some of the most highly-appreciated of our home talent. Justly famed for the variety and scope of her musical prowess—" (Mr. Jordano paused long over this word. It was not just what he wanted. Prodigies? No! Paladins? He looked up the word in his "Webster's Condensed," and rejected it hastily. "Prowess" would have to do)—"her musical prowess, Cyrus is accustomed to lead in all matters, relating to Music, Heavenly Maid, as the poet expresses it. Now, for the first time, Cyrus is prepared to yield a graceful precedence to One whose charms are as fully acknowledged as her gifts have made her conspicuous wherever the highest talent is

appreciated. Italio congratulates himself and the community on the rare treat in store for us next Thursday evening at eight o'clock precisely. Tickets on sale at Bygood's and in the magnificent Temple of Pharmacy presided over by our esteemed fellow citizen, Mr. Augustine Tooth."

. . . . . .

When Johanna Peters undertook a thing, she saw that it was properly done: there were no dropped stitches in her social knitting. Accordingly, she took good care that Mr. and Miss Quint should hear of the forthcoming event from no other than herself, going so far as to bind Miss Laughter to silence on the subject till this was accomplished. There was no time to be lost: a few hours after her interview with the *corpus delicti,* as Judge Peters persisted in calling the comedienne, Mrs. Peters, accurately dressed for calling, stood on Squire Quint's doorstep and plied the shining knocker with precisely the right shade of emphasis. The Squire himself opened the door, and bowed with his most urbane gesture of welcome.

"Johanna!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed a rare pleasure. Step in! step in! What chair will you choose? Allow me to present to you Mr. Tenterden, the young incumbent of—in short, Bygood's. He has been so good as to bring me an object of interest—of rare interest; an addition to my collection."

"I know Mr. Tenterden very well!" said Mrs. Peters in her crisp tones. "I'll have the little gold chair, please! It is curious that he should have brought you something to-day for the collection, because that is just what I have done. I picked up a box in New York the other day, and I thought it might be rather

good. But first let me see Mr. Tenterden's contribution!"

The old gentleman, with shining eyes, produced a quaint object about three inches long, and displayed it on the palm of his hand.

"A genuine snuff grater!" he exclaimed. "Observe! the spoon at one end, the box at the other, the grater in the middle! Hence the name rappee, from *râper,* to grate. A perfect specimen. I am extremely grateful to our young—a—neighbor for the valuable acquisition."

"I'm so glad!" said Timothy Tenterden, heartily, with the blush that became him so well. "It seemed to me quaint, but I didn't know whether you would care for it. I got it from that queer man on the wood road, Mr. Bite. Mr. Savory Bite!" he added, seeing them look puzzled.

Mrs. Peters laughed. "Naughty children!" she said. "Tom and Kitty's name for Avery Bright, Squire. Have you made acquaintance with him? That is not always easy to do. He is an odd stick."

"I like odd sticks!" said Tim simply. "You can always get something out of them, don't you think? I don't mean articles," he added hastily; "but—well, you get different lights on—on life and things. It's like different facets of a crystal, you see."

"Bless my soul!" said Squire Quint. "Are you a philosopher, young man?"

Tim laughed rather shamefacedly. "I wish I were!" he said. "I've been looking at crystals, and it struck me—but that's no matter! Might I be allowed to see the box that Mrs. Peters has brought?"

Mrs. Peters took the hint and promptly produced her box, a delicate piece of work in ebony and silver.

"Charming!" said the Squire. "Charming! My dear Johanna, this is indeed an acquisition. I am greatly obliged to you. Observe the form, that of a coiled snake. This shows the box to be of French manufacture. A fine taste, the French, but apt to run to the fantastic. Here we have," he opened a glass door, "another of the same period: a coffin, you observe: and here again, a boat. Much less convenient than the English forms, but more amusing to the frivolous, and French snuff takers would appear to have been uniformly frivolous."

"When did snuff first come in, sir?" asked Tim Tenterden, respectfully.

The Squire straightened himself, the ebony snake box still in his hand, and assumed an expository attitude. Mrs. Peters settled herself comfortably in her chair.

"The origin of the habit of snuff taking," he said, "is unknown. It has been attributed to Catherine di Medici, without, however, apparent foundation for the attribution. It came into fashion at the court of Louis XIV. We hear that Frederick the Great required great jars of snuff to be kept on the mantelpieces of his apartments, as the boxes with which his pockets were crammed proved insufficient."

"Do give us a 'tell' about snuff!" said Mrs. Peters. "It is ever so long since you have given me a 'tell,' and I am sure this young man has never heard you talk about it. Did the *Grand Monarque* take it himself? It doesn't seem quite his style, somehow."

"He did not!" replied the Squire. "He disliked

the effect of grains of snuff sprinkled upon lace ruffles, and though he never opposed the use of it, did not enjoy it. There are many anecdotes as to the use of snuff, my dear Johanna, many of which I may have told you in former years. A grain of snuff has cost a man's life; witness the case of Cathélineau, the Vendean patriot, or conspirator, as you choose, who was traced, when in hiding in a certain château, by the grains of snuff he had dropped on the floor, was found concealed under a trap door, and slain. Witness again the case of that prince of Condé, grandson of the great Condé, who, emptying his snuffbox, probably in idle or drunken jest, into a glass of champagne, presented it to a friend, who drank it, sickened, and died in terrible agony. But I weary you."

"Oh, please go on!" cried Timothy Tenterden, starting forward in his chair.

The young man was enjoying himself intensely. He had the collector's instinct, combined with a thirst for information and a great power of enjoyment. Every day, it seemed, he turned some new and wonderful page. It had been so more or less all his life, the world being so full of a number of things (only Tim had not yet found his Stevenson!); but never so much so as of late. The Cyrus people were all new types, all interesting, many wonderful. This astonishing old gentleman, now! It hardly seemed as if he could be real: like a figure on the stage! and the lady! Tim had been used to think scornfully of "high-brows"; but now—and they "belonged" so to the places they lived in! Tim glanced round the room, his quick eye taking in every detail, the walls in their mellow brown gold tint, the few precious pictures, the soft thick damask

and creamy lace of the curtains, the delicate lines of chair and table—they all "belonged," and the tall, commanding figure in frock coat and black satin stock, with the dark, flashing eyes and wave of silver hair, was in some indefinable way the fine flower of it all.

"Please go on, sir!" said Tim again.

"Yes, go on, Squire!" said Mrs. Peters. "You are a liberal education, you know you are. Why pretend to deny it? How many boxes did Frederick the Great have? I am sure you told me once."

"Fifteen hundred!" replied the Squire promptly, "beside innumerable pockets in his waistcoats; all this, mark me, in addition to the jars above mentioned. We have no record of the effect of this inordinate snuff taking upon the health of the monarch, but may well attribute to it some of his fantastic behaviour. Coming down to the time of Louis XVI, we find a jeweler making a large fortune by selling mourning snuffboxes in honor of the young queen, Marie Antoinette. They were composed of shagreen, which in French, I need not remind you, is *chagrin*. This furnished the witty jeweler with material for a play upon words, the boxes bearing a portrait of the queen and the legend *'La Consolation dans le chagrin.'* I have one of them here."

He produced the box, which was reverently inspected.

"What is that carved one next to it?" asked Tim. "A particularly pretty wood!"

"Shakespeare's mulberry tree!" replied the Squire. "Enough boxes have been made of it to build a man-of-war, we are told; speaking of which, I may also allude to Lord Stanhope's estimate that of forty years of a snuff taker's life, two were spent in tickling his

nose, and two more in blowing it. Lord Stanhope concludes that 'a proper application of the time and money thus lost to the public would constitute a fund for the discharge of England's national debt.'"

"You always hear of kings and such like giving snuffboxes," said Tim. "Have you any of those, sir?"

"Many," replied Mr. Quint, "many: some of them of value, as this."

He held up a box bearing on the lid an exquisite miniature surrounded by diamonds.

"Louise de la Vallière; one of the few authentic portraits. This other box of chased gold was given by George III to his prime minister, for services not wholly unconnected with the future well-being of our country. Napoleon Bonaparte used snuff, and was in the habit of putting in his pocket any box that was handed to him; absent-mindedly, you understand. Sometimes he returned, instead of the original box, a valuable one with diamonds or his own miniature on the lid. In this example, we have both."

He held out another box.

"It was a pretty expensive fad, wasn't it, sir?" asked the young man.

"One bill," responded the Squire, promptly, "presented by a certain jeweler to George IV for snuffboxes alone, was for eight thousand and odd pounds."

"My stars!" ejaculated Mrs. Peters. "They certainly had money in those days, if they did not have sense. Where is the emerald box, Squire? I don't see it."

"It was concealed by this ebony coffin." The Squire produced a small box and held it out on the palm of his hand.

"Gee!" exclaimed Tim Tenterden. "Excuse me, Mrs. Peters, but really, you know! Is that really an emerald, sir?"

"A' table emerald!" replied the Squire with complacency. "A tallow drop, you perceive, hardly perceptible, but still existent; otherwise, the jewel would be, I may say, a thing for a royal collection, not for that of a humble individual like myself." He bowed with a regal air.

Johanna Peters resisted the temptation to jump up and drop a curtsey.

"I forget the story!" she said. "Tell us. I know it came from the East, a case of a grateful Turk, or something of that sort."

The Squire assumed once more his platform air.

"The use of snuff," he said, "was never countenanced among the Orientals. In 1625, Amurath IV forbade his subjects to use snuff, under penalty of having their noses cut off. Mahomet IV bored the noses of snuff takers. The Shah of Persia exiled them. Spite of this, snuffboxes were made and used. This emerald box was presented to me by the Maharani of Oodleypore. The occurrence was a rather curious one."

He addressed Tim, who sat, wide-eyed, drinking in every word with an intensity of interest which could not fail to touch the old collector.

"I was a young man at the time, she a woman of a certain age. Her grandson, the youthful Maharajah, a boy of eight, was rude to his grandmother: saucy, in point of fact. I—er—thought it proper to correct him. In short, I—er—spanked the brat. Etiquette required me to leave the court in consequence of this,

but the old lady, pleased, it would seem, by an effort of discipline to which she had felt herself unequal, sent this box after me with—in short, with a flattering message."

"Oh, come!" cried Johanna Peters, "she asked you to come back and marry her, you know she did."

The Squire shook his head, looking, however, not ill pleased, and was about to reply when a high-pitched voice was heard in the entry, the front door banged, and Miss Lila Laughter made her appearance.

"Well, well, well!" said that lady. "So here we are again! How do you do, Mrs. Peters? Been making things straight for me, what? Awfully good of you, I am sure."

The Squire's brow darkened. Mrs. Peters and Tim both rose to their feet.

"How do you do, Miss Laughter?" said the former. "I came to call on you and Miss Quint, but the Squire beguiled me in here, and has exercised his old-time fascination so thoroughly that I have been unable to tear myself away; or even," she added, with a mischievous glance at the Squire, "to introduce one of the chief objects of my call. Squire, we are going to have a great treat here next week, a musicale, at the Mallow House. Your cousin, Miss Laughter, is going to be good enough to sing for us, and this young man," she nodded toward Tim, "and Lina Chanter are to sing some duets, and there are to be other pleasant features. I am going in now to tell Hippolyta all about it, but I want to enlist your enthusiastic interest: enthusiastic, mind, Squire! And I shall expect to sell you my very first tickets. Good-by, and thank you so much for the 'tell.' It has really seemed

like old times. It seems only yesterday that Almy and Egeria and I sat here in a row, three fifteen-year-old girls, hanging on your words, as you told us about the emerald box. Good-by, dear Squire! Good-by, Mr. Tenterden! Ask him to show you the snuff cane and tell you that story. Shall we go out, Miss Laughter? Shall we go to Hippolyta's sitting room?"

She slipped her arm in Miss Laughter's and led her away.

"I think it's all right," she said, "but we'll let him have time to digest it a little now. Come with me and we'll break it to Miss Polly!"

CHAPTER XII

THE EVENT OF THE SEASON

I WAS not present at the musicale: after all, I do not live in Cyrus, worse luck; but from all accounts it must have been a wonderful occasion. Mr. Jordano really outdid himself in the *Centinel,* of which four marked copies were sent me besides my regular one. The dear gentleman piled up his adjectives till they fairly tumbled over one another: I counted five "exquisites" in one column. The various "numbers" were delicious, inspiring, melting, melodious, celestial, ecstatic, thrilling, majestic, sonorous, and I forget what else. Every costume was described in minute detail, from the "confection of moss-green velvet with garniture of frosted gold, worn with imperial grace by Mrs. Judge Peters" (her wedding dress, as I and all Cyrus knew!) to the "filmy gauzes which, like the dew-besprent gossamers of morning, enwreathed the fairy forms of Cyrus's fairest daughters, the Misses Chanter."

Alas! "gauzes" appeared once more in the article—with less happy effect: Mr. Jordano had described the new blouses which the Caddie sisters, Miss Ruby and Miss Pearl, had made expressly for the occasion, as "exquisite creations of turquoise satin with dashes of cramasy gauze." Wilson Wibird was working as compositor in the printing office at this time, and being, as was so often the case, "not quite himself" (kindly Cyrusian phrase!) had rendered it "turkey satin with

dashes of cranberry sauce." There was a good deal of feeling about this: it was thought by many that Mr. Jordano, in seeking for unusual expressions, had exceeded the limits of good taste.

"If he meant crimson, why couldn't he *say* crimson?" demanded poor Miss Ruby, with tears. "Found it in an old ballad? I don't see that that makes it any better. It would seem that an editor should possess a dictionary; and I sent six copies to friends before I read it through!"

But though I read and reread every word of Mr. Jordano's four columns, my best account of the musicale was in a letter from Zephine Chanter. Zephine may be flighty, but she is a capital correspondent; and being just the right age then to have a young girl's *tendre* for an older one, she had a way of pouring herself out to me in letters, greatly to the benefit of one so hungry for Cyrus news as I always was. According to her, it was certainly "a crackerjack performance."

"Lina and Tim Tenterden sang beautifully, though they both seemed a little *off their feed* somehow. They hadn't rehearsed enough: we couldn't *get* them to rehearse. I don't know what is the matter with Lina; but I'll come back to that later. Anyhow, they sang deliciously when it came to the point: 'Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast,' and 'I would that my love.' When it came to 'I'd shelter thee,' you felt that he *would,* Mary: that he was *dying* to; there was a perfect *thrill* in his voice. Goodness me! If he had sung like that to me, I should have said, 'Well, *do!* I'd love to be sheltered!' You know I am perfectly *gone* on Tim Tenterden, and I might as well be gone on a friendly

iceberg: a *warm* iceberg, if you know what I mean. Well! and Sty and I played as well as we knew how, and people applauded and said nice things; but of course the *sensation* was when Miss Lila Laughter appeared on the scene. My dear, *if* you could have seen her! Impossible to describe her! She was in white and spangles, plenty of both, I will say—I am perfectly sure she is *most* respectable, in spite of Mrs. Tooth—gold spangles to match her hair, and bracelets and bangles and necklaces and chains and lockets and earrings, and everything else you can think of, besides gold boots. She really was a vision! very handsome in her way; not young, of course; must be well into the thirties; but really quite stunning. Her voice is the most extraordinary! the highest soprano I ever heard, and she does all sorts of stunts with it, most extraordinary trills and quavers. Well, we've never had anything like it, and to tell you the truth, Mary, most of us didn't know what to make of it. You know how *smooth* Lina's singing is, with that sort of velvet quality that makes everybody feel soothed and peaceful; but this sky-rocket performance sent us almost flying out of our chairs. Mr. Mallow and Mr. Jordano sat behind us, and I wish you could have heard them. Mr. Mallow just said, 'Jee-rusalem crickets!' over and over again. It seemed all he was capable of, except gasps; and Mr. Jordano began to roll out things which he thought were Italian. I don't believe they were, but he enjoyed them just as much. I only captured a few of them. 'O imperialo!' was one of them, I know. 'O splendorio! O magnifico!' They went on and on, those two old dears, with no idea that anybody heard them, till Sty and I

nearly rolled off our seats, and Ma had to reprove us most severely. I need not say that Pa and Ma behaved beautifully. Pa went to sleep only once, and that was while Sty and I were playing, and so it was quite all right, the old dear! but Ma's air of bland connoisseurship was quite splendid, and I was awfully proud of her. She wore her gray silk. I saw nobody better looking there except Lina. Well, so she sang—I don't mean dearest Ma, but Miss Laughter!—sang and sparkled and sky-rocketed, and had everybody in a twitter. Then when we were applauding one of these *bravura* performances (I believe that is the word, isn't it?) she ducked a curtsey and gave us a wink. Yes, she did! And said something about resting a minute, and whisked off the stage. My dear, she was not gone five minutes when she reappeared in *the* most extraordinary rig. How she did it, I do not know. She is a tall woman, with a really splendid figure; but she had got herself up to look like a little girl of seven. I don't know what she had done with her hair. She must have two wigs. This was all a crop of little curls, and she was dressed in a white pinafore, with a blue sash and a coral necklace, and a hoop and hoop-stick in her hand. *Mary!* I ask you to imagine the effect of this upon Cyrus! Honestly, my dear, it was simply one gasp that went up from the whole audience. Then she began to dance, whistling an accompaniment herself, well, just exactly the sort of dance that a little girl would make up, hopping and turning, and waving her little hands—they really are little, and awfully pretty, and it was really too perfectly killing for anything, and when we got our breath back again and began to laugh—I was really afraid for a minute

that nobody would laugh, and that would have been *too* awful—just as we were getting into a real good laugh, she stopped short and called out, 'I want my young man. Come up here, young What's-your-name! Tenterden! Tim Tenterden. I want you up here.' T. T. was sitting just in front of us. I saw him start as if he had been shot. Don't tell me he was prepared for it. I know better. He had *no idea* she was going to do anything of the sort. He hesitated, half got up, then sat down again; but when she said again, 'I want you! Come up here!' of course he couldn't do anything else. He is the most polite soul that ever lived. He got up, turning all the colors of the rainbow, and went up the three little steps of the platform. Then, my dear, this young woman—at least, not exactly young, if she did look like seven years old just then—tucked her arm in his and turned him around to face the audience and sang, as nearly as I can remember, these words, to a tune I am sure she must have made up herself, for I never heard anything in the least like it:

'We've come here to visit in Cyrus,
To see how the folks will admire us;
But, oh, my dear, please
Mind your q's and your p's,
Or I'm awfully 'fraid they may fire us!'

Everybody was too astonished at first even to laugh. *I* think, though Ma doesn't, that she was going on to another verse, but Tim Tenterden, as white as a sheet, pulled his arm away from her, made her a queer little sort of bow, stalked down those steps and out of the hall! *Now,* my dear, I have given you the sensation

of the evening. Nothing seemed to matter after that. We applauded, of course, and Miss Laughter laughed her funny high trill—she has two laughs; one seems to strike a regular octave, and the other trills on two or three high notes; she must have practised them for years—and then said to us, 'That's the way it takes *him,* you see. You never can tell. I oughtn't to have sprung it on him.' Then she sang another song, about being little Dotty Dimple, and that was funny and pretty, and everything went off all well; but I want to know if you ever *could* have imagined such an occasion as this in blessed Cyrus, as Kitty calls it. Dear me, how I wish you and Kitty had been here!"

Zephine went on to say that she wasn't pleased about Lina, who didn't seem a bit like herself. She, Zephine, was sure she needed a change. Didn't I want her for a visit? She was sure it would do her good, and it would give her time to get her poor mind straightened out. I should hear all about it the next time she, Zephine, and I were together.

Now Zephine Chanter, though a rattle, has a very good little head of her own. The upshot of this letter was one from me to Lina, begging hard for the visit she had been promising me for months, and a few days later I was welcoming the dear girl on the station platform of the city of my exile. But of this hereafter.

I was to learn later that not all of Cyrus Society was present at the famous musicale. Mrs. Augustine Tooth and her sister-in-law, Mrs. Tenterden, stayed at home. It was not from choice that the latter foreswent the pleasure, to which she had looked forward, of hearing her boy sing and of seeing, as well as hear-

ing, the new comet which sparkled in the Cyrus firmament. She had fully expected to go; had laid out her neat bonnet and her evening wrap, and was about to put them on, when a hasty knock summoned her to her bedroom door. Opening it, she found her brother standing there with agitated looks.

"Martha," he said, "will you come and see what you can do with Emmeline? She is having highsterics, the highest I ever see—I would say, saw. I don't know what has come over Emmeline. I am not aware that I have done anything to put her into this state. Do come and see what you can do, Martha! I have tried smelling-salts and burnt feathers, but neither seems to do her any good. She called me an old goose, Marthy, and asked if they were my own feathers. My feelings are lacerated, considerably lacerated. I think I will stay at home myself."

Tears stood in Mr. Tooth's mild eyes. His sister gave him a kind glance and then administered a good-natured little push.

"You go right along to the concert, Gustine," she said. "I'll stay with Emmeline. I know what's the matter with her. I can bring her round all right. Go along."

"Do you—do you think I'd better, Marthy?" Mr. Tooth faltered. "I don't want to seem unkind, but I *should* like to hear the music. It isn't often we have anything so choice in our neighborhood, though the local talent," he hastened to add, "is very fine, very fine indeed. But this is something—something *extremely* choice, you know, Martha."

"I know!" said Martha. "Trot right along. Hark! There's Tim calling this minute. Just tell him—no,

send him up to me. You be getting your coat and muffler!"

A few words in her son's ear sent him off arm in arm with his uncle, a partly puzzled, but always sympathetic and helpful companion. Mrs. Tenterden put away her bonnet and mantle, like the methodical soul she was, and then went into the boodwore, as Mr. Tooth proudly called his wife's sitting room. This little room had been intended as a peace-offering to console his Emmeline for the painful riches which so distressed her; much affection and good will had gone into its furnishing. Mr. Tooth, though in general yielding to Mrs. Peters's advice, had furnished this room according to his own taste. He "wanted Emmeline should have things tasty." The velvet carpet was an inch thick; huge bunches of roses strewed its white surface. The chairs were in pink satin damask, upholstered within an inch of their lives, all tufts and tassels and fringe. There was a rosewood and ormolu desk which gave Mrs. Peters, she said, a caniption fit every time she looked at it. There were lace curtains and satin curtains, and inside lace blinds, and more tassels, and there was a sofa, fit only, to quote Mrs. Peters again, for a decadent Roman to wallow on. And on the four sides of the room there were four mirrors which reflected Mrs. Tooth's figure to an extent which she said gave her the creeps the enduring time.

In the midst of this unchastened splendor, Mrs. Tooth was now sitting, in a satin rocking chair, her feet on a satin foot stool, weeping tears of desolation. She looked up, handkerchief in hand, as Mrs. Tenterden entered the room.

"Is he g-g-gone?" she gurgled, convulsively.

"He? Augustine? Yes, he's gone. I have just sent him and Tim along. 'Twas time they started."

"Ain't you going?" asked Mrs. Tooth, with another gurgle.

"No, I'm going to stay with you. Now, Emmeline, I'd behave, if I was you," Mrs. Tenterden advised kindly. "Stop crying! I don't see what you're crying about."

"He's gone!" cried Mrs. Tooth. "He's gone to make eyes at that painted Jezebel there. She's leading him away. She's leading away my husband, that I've been faithful to ever since we was married. Just because I don't paint my face and wear a yellow wig, he's gone and left me. Ain't it awful? Oh, Marthy, ain't it awful? And what have I done to deserve it? I have been a good wife, you know I have been a good wife. I have never thought of anybody else but Augustine Tooth since first I see him. I wish't you'd hang a shawl over one of them looking-glasses," she added piteously. "I can't get away from 'em anyhow, and see the figger I am!"

Mrs. Tenterden complied, and turned the chair so that no mirror met the eyes of the dejected little lady.

"Emmeline, you're real foolish!" she said comfortably. "I don't say Gustine's the wisest man that ever lived, but yet he's a sight wiser than you are."

"I'd like to know how!" said Mrs. Tooth. "You can't deny he's gone to hear that Jezebel of a woman; you can't deny it, Martha Tenterden!"

"Gustine's very fond of music," said Mrs. Tenterden. "This woman sings well, and my Tim's going to sing, and that sweet, pretty Chanter girl. There's to

be other music, too. I don't see that Gustine was bound to stay at home, Emmeline, just because one of the performers makes up in a way you don't like. You don't want to be unreasonable, you know."

"I don't want to live any more!" Mrs. Tooth proclaimed. "If my husband is going gallivanting after painted Jezebels, I don't want to live any more. I'll go to the pharmacy and get something that'll put me to sleep, and never wake up again. Now that's what I'll do, Martha Tenterden, and you'll see if I don't. As if it wasn't enough," she cried, "to leave my little home and live in all this *awful* style, but I must lose my husband! I think it's cruel! I think it's cruel!"

"You haven't lost your husband," said Mrs. Tenterden patiently, "nor you aren't going to. As to gallivanting, it is not so. I know what you allude to; Gustine told me about it. Miss Laughter was in the store—came in to buy a box of lozenges for her throat —and it came on to rain; poured right down in rivers: 'twas that Tuesday afternoon, you know. There she was in her white shoes, the soles like paper; and the team came to fetch Gustine home, and what could he do, I ask you? Drive off with his pair, and let her paddle back in the rain to Squire Quint's, a mile if it is a step? If he'd done that, I shouldn't have spoken to him for a week!"

"He drove her the len'th of Cyrus Street, under the eyes of all!" lamented Mrs. Tooth. "His umbrella over her, and his co't round her. Sophia Sharpe saw it, and come postin' down to tell me. She said such a sight never was seen in Cyrus Street before, and she was only thankful Cissy wasn't with her."

"I wish Sophia Sharpe was in Guinea!" observed

Mrs. Tenterden, "and Cissy with her! I should think you'd know better than to give heed to what she says, Emmeline; I should, really."

"It's cruel!" repeated Mrs. Tooth. "And she's in there every day, Sophia says: and to hear her say that in Stacey Budge's time the place was respectable, if it wasn't all dolled up like a saloon. Oh! oh! it *is* cruel, Martha! I never *wanted* that place dolled up like the Queen of Sheba, nor this house neither, you know I never did! And the one thing I ever asked for I never could have!"

"What was it you asked for, Emmeline?"

"Twins! I wanted twins. The Lord wouldn't give 'em to me, and money can't buy 'em, and I wish't I was dead, I do so!"

"It does seem strange," said Mrs. Tenterden, musingly, "that you never had any children, craving them the way you do; but it seems more strange to me, Emmeline, that you have never adopted any. Why don't you find some twins and adopt 'em?"

"I'd like to know how I could find 'em, Martha Tenterden. Twins don't grow on any currant bushes that ever I heard of. I haven't heard of a twin in any of these three villages, except those Peavey twins over to Tupham. One of them was feeble-minded, and the other had a harelip, and they're both dead anyhow; and as to adopting, it's an awful risk to adopt children. They may turn out a burglar, or they may have drink in 'em, or the like of that; but yet I would do it if I could hear of a likely pair, with a handle to them, if you know what I mean."

Mrs. Tenterden nodded thoughtfully.

"Why don't you go and look?" she said. "Why

don't you go to New York? You haven't been to New York since Gustine came into his fortune. I don't believe you have been out of Cyrus village, Emmeline Tooth. Now what a way that is to act! What's the good of all this money, I should like to know, if you are going to stay here like a bump on a log?"

"If you ask me, Martha Tenterden, I answer you that, in my opinion, there is *no* good in all this money. The Lord only knows how it was made, and I *hope* the Lord knows how it will be spent. *I* do *not!* If it doesn't spell ruin for my poor husband and me, it's all I ask. And as for going to New York City, I say to you, not while I have the power to stay away! I was to New York once, and I suffered insult there."

"Emmeline, what do you mean?" Mrs. Tenterden broke into a little laugh, half amused, half provoked. Emmeline really was enough to put a saint out of patience. "How did you suffer insult in New York, I should like to know?"

"I will tell you, Martha Tenterden, though it is not a thing I care to speak of. Three years ago, I went to New York to visit with Gustine's folks. They was living in New Jersey, and I was obliged to pass through the city. I had never been that way before (and let me say that I hope never to be that way again) and after we had been going much as half a lifetime, it seemed to me, the train began to draw through a lot of tunnels and places that they didn't seem like anything at all in this world. I don't know how to describe 'em, nor yet I don't want to. Anyway, I got all confused in my mind and I called to the conductor and I says, 'Does this train stop at New York?'

I says. He looks at me kind of sharp and he says, 'All I know is, if it doesn't, there'll be a hell of a smash-up!' Now I ask you, Martha Tenterden, if that was a way for a married woman to be spoke to in a public train, going to New York! I don't see what you're laughing at!"

CHAPTER XIII

MOTHER AND SON

IT might have been an hour and a half later. Mrs. Tooth was tucked up comfortably in her luxurious bed, dreaming of twins. Mrs. Tenterden was nodding comfortably over her knitting, when the front door opened suddenly and shut with a bang which startled the good lady like a pistol shot. She looked up, to see her son standing before her with disheveled hair and frantic looks. Mrs. Tenterden recognized his aspect; "he's wild!" she said inwardly.

"Well, son!" she spoke with cheerful calm; "was it a nice concert? Where's Uncle Gustine?"

Tim made a vague gesture, implying that Uncle Gustine might be in the Red Sea or elsewhere for all he knew.

"Mother," he broke out hotly, "this has got to end! I can't stand it, and I won't. Either she must go, or I must."

"One, two, purl! Sit down, son!" said Mother Tenterden, comfortably.

"It's no use, I tell you, mother——"

"I said, 'sit down!'" said his mother.

Tim sat down.

"Now, if you'll just wait till I count this row," the lady went on, "we'll hear all about it!"

The lad sat still, breathing hard. Mother was not always easy to understand. You would think some-

times she didn't care—only of course you knew she really——

"Seventy-three!" Mrs. Tenterden looked up calmly. "Seventy-three stitches. Now, Timmy, let's hear about it!"

Out it all came with a rush; anger, love, misery, passion, in a torrent of broken sentences. How he had become friends with Miss Lina Chanter, *real* friends, he had hoped. Mother knew—no, she didn't know what she was; nobody could, except—well, anybody could see there was no one like her in the world. Singing beside her in the choir, honestly, it was like—like standing beside an angel. And—and she and her sister had got into the way of coming in on Wednesday afternoons for a cup of tea and a chat; it had been great, simply great! She knew so much about books, don't you see; and her advice had meant so much: sometimes they read poetry: her reading was something wonderful. He wished mother could hear her! And now—it was all different. This Miss Laughter had turned everything upside down, and ruined all his pleasure, and he could—not—stand it!

Timothy Tenterden sprang up and ranged the room with long strides, stopping here to twitch a curtain, there to rattle the tongs aimlessly. His mother watched him over her spectacles.

"Suppose you hold this yarn for me!" she said presently. "I can't talk, nor yet think, while you sprangle about so."

The lad turned a white, piteous face on her.

"Honestly, mother," he said, "I—I don't feel like holding yarn just now."

"I don't know that that matters, my dear!" said Mother Tenterden.

"No, I don't suppose it does!" said Tim ruefully. He flung himself into a chair, and held out his hands. "What a pretty shade of pink!" he said, with an effort.

"Yes, isn't it? Like a rose, I thought when I picked it out."

A rose; or a rose-tinted cheek! Tim watched the strands as they flew; watched, as he had watched ever since he could remember, the mysterious growth of the ball, so smooth and symmetrical. It *was* a lovely tint. He had seen its like one happy day last week, when, meeting Her in the street, he had been allowed to go with Her to the Crewel Shop for some trifling purchase.

"Come here, Lina!" the little lame gentleman had said. "I want to match this pink to your cheeks, see if it's the right shade for this rose."

And then she had blushed—ah, how divinely crimson! and Mr. Jebus said now she had spoiled it, and he wasn't working a piny. How they all talked to her, these queer people, as if they were her uncles or grandfathers; and how sweetly and merrily she always answered! They all adored her, anybody could see that. Nice people they were, too, though queer as quails. He laughed, and his mother looked up inquiringly.

"I was thinking of what Mr. Jebus said the other day about Uncle Gustine," Tim explained. "Said he was a good man, none better, but his tailboard was out. I thought it was pretty good. It seems uncle has offered to pull down their little shebang and build

them a new one in the latest style. They nearly had a fit."

"Somebody's tailboard will have to be out," said Mrs. Tenterden, calmly, "if they are going to have that new town hall. There! that's done, and thank you for sitting still, son!"

Timothy Tenterden rose, and bending over, kissed her forehead with its wise wrinkles.

"Mother," he said, "you *are* a corker! You have smoothed me all out, just like the worsted; and I *was* in a tangle!" he added with a rueful laugh. "Now I can talk and not gibber, and you shall hear about the concert."

He told the story quietly enough, though he could not keep the anger out of his voice when he came to the climax.

"I made her a bow, and I walked out of the hall and came home. I couldn't say anything to a woman, and I wouldn't stay and be put upon in that way. She had no right to drag me into her—fandangoes. What would you have done, mother?"

Mother Tenterden reflected.

"I think you did the right thing!" she said. "I think I should probably have done the same. I hope the lesson will do her good."

"And she has no right to go calling me her young man!" Tim was growing hot again. "She says it over and over again every chance she gets. 'Here's my young man! my young man will do this or that for me!' and I'll be hanged if I will. There's no reason why I should; and I won't. It's—got—to—stop!"

Mrs. Tenterden looked at him.

"Tim," she said, "why does she do it?"

Tim stared at her. "Do what?"

"Call you her young man! She must have *some* ground, or think she has." Then, as he continued to stare open-mouthed— "You have never told me how you ever came to know her at all, or she you."

"I haven't? Well, if that isn't the limit!"

He pondered, and broke into his boyish laugh.

"I know why I didn't at first!" he said. "I didn't think it was—well, you remember what you used to say about knights when I was a little chap. I was grown up before I stopped asking myself, 'Would Sir Lancelot do it?' about anything where a lady came in. And—I've always hated false hair and that kind of thing—for a woman; I mean, I'm not used to it!" he added, with a glance at the heavy ripples of silver that had been his childish idea of a halo. (He saw the word as "hay-low." When his own hair was tousled, mother used to say it looked like a hay-mow; he supposed that "hay-low" meant smooth and beautiful hair. Tim was a quaint child.)

He rose—quietly this time—and going to the mantelpiece, began to move the ornaments about.

"I hate this glass poodle!" he said over his shoulder. "She has the most beautiful hair in the world, mother, except yours!"

"Who has? The poodle (it's rock crystal, by the way, and Gustine Tooth paid a hundred solid dollars for it!) or Miss Laughter?"

"Mother!" Tim faced about indignant. "I mean Miss—I mean my Lina! there! I might as well out with it. Her hair is like the softest black cloud, and yet it has a shimmer like satin where it lies smooth; and where it curls round her ear—did you ever notice

her ears, mother? They are like the most wonderful—Oh, darn! now I've done it!"

The crystal poodle had slipped through his fingers and now lay in a dozen pieces on the marble hearthstone.

"I'm awfully sorry!" said Tim, gazing at the shining fragments. "I never cared for it, but——"

"I always disliked the beast!" said Mrs. Tenterden calmly. "Pick up the pieces! There's his pink coral tongue, over there! His eyes are real garnets. Silly thing! I'm waiting to hear about your meeting Miss Laughter, Timmy."

Tim picked up the pieces slowly; brought dustpan and brush, like the well-trained lad he was, and swept up carefully every crumb of crystal, pursuing them into distant corners of the room: carried them away to the dust bin, and returning, sat down again, still very sober.

"Well?" said Mrs. Tenterden, with a certain incisive note of inquiry.

"I will! I will! It was in the sleeping-car, coming on here— he first time, before I went back for you. The porter was showing me to my berth, walking before me, when flop! something fell from an upper berth, right at his feet. He was just setting his foot on it, when I snatched it out from under. It was—well, it was what Miss Laughter wears on her head; and at that moment I heard a little high squeak, 'Oh! oh! me sheveloor!' and there was a face looking out from the upper berth. Mother, her own hair is dark!"

Mrs. Tenterden nodded. "It would be!" she said. "Her eyes are brown. Go on, Timmy!"

"So I handed it to her, and the porter grinned, and

she thanked me much more than enough, and I supposed there was an end of it. But in the morning there she was, all dressed up to the nines, waiting to thank me again. Why, mother, you'd think I had saved her life. Why, I didn't know where to look. When we met again she would see what she could do for me, and so forth and so on. I tell you I was glad when we got to the station. Not that she isn't pleasant and all that, you know, but—well, I never expected to set eyes on her again, that's all, and now here she is—and wants to run my business!"

Tim started to spring up again, but recollecting himself sat still, and ran his fingers through his hair, making it stand on end like that of his reverend namesake.

"To run your business?" Mrs. Tenterden repeated.

"Yes! she's in the store at all hours, telling folks what to buy, and what books to take out, and—honestly, mother, I don't think I *can* stand it."

"You can't, and shan't!" Mother Tenterden spoke decisively. "We'll think it over, and see what's best to be done. Hark! is that Uncle Gustine coming in?"

"Yes! I'll go out. But — mother — do you think——"

"Yes, son?"

"Do you think—do you suppose—you could help me in any way about—about Her? You see—" They had both risen now, and he was holding both his mother's kind hands; "I can't get a chance to speak to her, or much as ever. She doesn't come into the store—that is—well, she did once, last week, and Miss Laughter was there again, and wanted to pick out a book for her—Great Cæsar! what does she know about books, I'd like to know? And she—I mean Miss

Lina—hasn't been in since; of course she hasn't! I wouldn't if I were she. And if I go to the house, the others are always there—not that I don't like them all, but you know how it is—and anyhow she isn't a bit like she was before all this came about. At choir practice it's the same. She's always an angel, she couldn't be anything else; but it's a cold angel, instead of a friendly one. If I could once make her see, make her understand—or if you could—mother?"

Mother Tenterden looked at him.

"Tim," she said, "where I was brought up, they used to say that there were two 'musts' for mortals: a woman must bear her own child, and a man must court his own girl."

Up went Tim's head, back went his shoulders; how like his father he was!

"All right!" he said. "I'll get her."

"That's the way to talk!" said Mother Tenterden.

But a little later, brushing out her handsome gray hair, she confided to the mirror her opinion that the little girl must be a goose.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

WAS Lina a goose? Perhaps she was. Kitty Ross would have seen through the whole matter at once and tossed it over her shoulder with a laugh. Lina was not Kitty, yet she was a sensible girl as a rule, and so far as I know, this was the only time when her wise little head failed her. But it was not an easy time for the child. She had been a child of dreams, the quiet one amid a gay and rather boisterous family of brothers and sisters. Now, as has been said, one sister and brother were gone: Rodney was in college; Zephine had quieted down more or less since her hair went up and her skirts came down. (Skirts did come down in those days!) Lina was the eldest at home, and while leading a busy and active life, had continued to dream her dreams: dreams of a fairy prince, the usual fairy prince, "with joyful eyes and lighter-footed than the fox," who should be entirely different from all the dear Cyrus people. They were delightful, but they were mostly old, and she had known them from her cradle. They were part of the setting of the picture, not of the picture itself.

Well! now, suddenly, the dream had come true. Here *was* the fairy prince! in his own eyes a most unprincelike and ordinary young man; in hers, everything that a prince should be. His music, his love of books, even his ignorance of books, so frank, so full

of eager desire and appreciation; even his faults seemed to brighten his image; and oh, wonder! oh, almost unbelievable thought! he seemed to like her; seemed to like to talk to her better than to Zephine, who was so much brighter, so much gayer, so much—but here I think Lina may have paused, for she was an honest soul, and she cannot have thought in her heart that Zephine really was prettier than she!

However it was, he did seem to enjoy being with her, and all her gentle heart went out to him. She, no less than he, had looked forward to those meetings in the back shop. It had been sweet to pour tea for him (he liked it strong! he was so strong himself, she thought, he couldn't help it!); sweeter yet to talk over the books, new and old: to hear him read, in his eager, boyish fashion, stumbling now and then over a word—he certainly made queer work of Browning now and then—but so anxious to be set right, so humble and thankful for correction! It was wonderful for a strong man to be so humble: it showed how open and truthful he was.

> "With the strong man's hand of labor,
> And childhood's heart of play."

How beautiful that was! how like him!

And now, all of a sudden, this dreadful thing had come. A woman such as she had never seen in her life before, a woman, it would seem, straight out of the prophecies of Isaiah, who "walked with stretched forth neck and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as she went," had come between them and taken him

away from her. Not that he was hers; he might never have been; only he *had* seemed to like her——

The woman had been singing to him and dancing round him, with her hand on his shoulder, and he—he had been laughing! He liked it! He had forgotten that he had asked her to come in that afternoon——

Oh, she had been mistaken. It was all a foolish, foolish dream, and she must put it immediately away from her and go on with her duty. She had slept and dreamed that life was beauty, and now she had waked and found that life was duty. She said this wise little verse over and over to herself, and all the other wise little verses with which her head had been stored since her childhood.

So she had resolutely put the dream away, quite in the back of her head (since it could not be induced to go away altogether), and had gone about her business. She had been neglectful of late, shamefully neglectful, of many people who looked to her for all sorts of little things. Poor old Mr. Hanks! He was grumpy, but that was no reason why she should not arrange his shelves for him. His spring goods would have come in, and he would have been looking for her this week past. Mrs. Wibird, too, forlorn soul, must need cheering up. Her only daughter had married Lina's oldest brother, Bobby, and gone to Massachusetts. She was left alone with her son, Wilson, the village ne'er-do-weel, whom she pathetically tried to keep straight, with but small measure of success. Lina must go and read to her and show her a new crochet stitch. And that reminded her of the dear Twinny gentlemen, as she called the Messrs. Jebus. She must go and have a good "sit" with them, and see all the

spring shades, and help Mr. Josiah choose his patterns. Oh, how many things there were to do! How full life was, of all kinds of things! How wicked she had been to go dreaming about, forgetting all the things that she ought to be doing! Perhaps that was why it had happened, and he had never—never needed her at all! He would forget very soon. After all, he was only a newcomer. His thoughts, his heart, were elsewhere. Very likely he was engaged. But oh, not—and a little silent cry of pain went up—not to that mincing woman! How could that—how could that be? But he had laughed. He had seemed amused.

So Lina put her dreams away, folded them and docketed them, as it were, methodically, and went about her business. She hoped to find comfort in it, but there wasn't much comfort. The dream seemed to follow her everywhere and to give her little stabs that hurt.

She was at Mr. Jebus's, going through the pattern book, trying to enjoy it as she used to do, thinking how lovely the rainbow heaps of floss silk were; like a heap of flower petals tossed together and stirred up with a sunbeam.

"Pretty, aren't they?" said Mr. Josiah. "Pick me out a good leaf green, will ye? Rose leaf, kind o' dark. Let me see! last time you were doing this, Lina, that young chap was with you, Tenterden; Tim Ten, the boys call him. I haven't seen him round with you lately. Taken up with that Laughter woman, or girl, or whatever she is."

"Has he?" said Lina. "Here is a good green, Mr. Jebus."

"So I understand! Understand she calls him her young man and the like of that. No accounting for tastes, is there, Lina? Not but what she's a personable woman, for any one who likes that style. Too showy for us! I guess we can pick up some other nice young fellow, what say? Cyrus never was wanting in nice fellows as I know of."

"Cyrus never was wanting in anything nice!" said Lina. "See, Mr. Jebus, here is the exact shade for the underside of the leaf! I'll put it here, shall I, so it will be ready to your hand. A beautiful spray! I can almost smell the sweetness. Good-by! I must write that note for Mr. Jason."

This was before the musicale; it was the day after it, as she was on her way to the post office, that Mrs. Sharpe joined her.

"I'm going your way!" said that lady. "Two's company, I always say. How are you, Lina? I must say you look real pickéd. All this singing takes it out of your looks, don't it? Nervous, I call it! I've always kept Cissy out of those kind of things, but few people are so particular, I know. Well, Lina, *what* do you think of the new engagement?"

"What engagement, Mrs. Sharpe?" asked Lina faintly. She could not like Mrs. Sharpe. It was wicked in a minister's daughter to dislike any of her father's people. The heart was desperately wicked——

"I guess you know well enough!" Mrs. Sharpe fixed eager eyes on the girl, noticing how her color came and went. "I guess every one knows who was to that show last night, and I guess they meant every one should. But what gets me is why he went off that way. Did you see him near to, Lina? Some say

he had the nosebleed, but I can swear to it he didn't put his handkerchief up. He passed close to Cissy, and *she* said he was all colors of the rainbow to once. There *are* those who claim he'd been drinking and found he couldn't stand straight, but I should be lawth to believe—*now will you look!* if there they ain't at this moment, parading along together! I'm sure if anybody had any remaining doubts, this would set them at rest. They look as if they were going to church this minute, don't they? he! he!"

Did they? I should be sorry to see a bridegroom with a face so white and set as this of Tim's as he stalks along, chin in air, eyes looking straight ahead. Now he sees Lina and her companion, and the color flames up into his cheeks, and his eyes flash with some strong emotion.

"Looks real embarrassed, don't he?" whispers Mrs. Sharpe. "I don't wonder, do you? She seems well content, though!"

Yes, Miss Laughter certainly did seem well content. She was clicking along on her high heels, twirling her white parasol, and chatting away gaily.

"Scandalous, I call it," she was saying in her high, clear voice. "Your behavior was simply scandalous, Tim Ten. If little Lila wasn't so good-natured, she'd never speak to you again. And all because I was trying to give you a little lift. There were loads of people there from places bigger than this little Sleepy Hollow. I wanted to show 'em my good-looking young man. Then, if you'd behaved, I'd have brought in a gag about the store, told 'em to come here to get their pens and their calendars, and their books; told 'em I'd pick out a book for them and only charge them five cents a

pick. You really were a goat, me dear, and almost spoiled me climax. Fortunately little Lila knows how to pick up the end of a climax as well as another. I just twirled me cloak over me shoulder, picked up a notebook and walked across the platform, like old Jordano. Never spoke a word, you understand, wouldn't hurt the dear man's feelings for the world, but everybody in the hall except himself saw, and it brought the house down. How de do? how de do?" with a gay smile and a twirl of the parasol as she recognized the two ladies. "Glad to see you! Lovely day, isn't it? Hope you liked the show last night!" And she passed with a gracious bow and smile.

"Now," said Mrs. Sharpe, "there's no one in this world hates to be uncharitable as I do. It isn't my nature, nor I wasn't brought up to it; but if that young man hasn't been drinking, then I never saw anybody who had, that's all. Lina, his feet tottered under him. Don't tell me! I have seen enough of that kind of thing to know, and I want to warn you; not there's any danger now, since he's taken up with this woman, but what your parents are thinking of to have that young man at the house as they have——"

"We will not criticize my parents, if you please!" said Lina, quietly, "and I am going in here now. Good morning."

. . . . . .

"Step in a moment, if you please, Miss Laughter."

"Sorry, me dear, but I must be going Promised Mr. Mallow I'd toss him up a salad for supper. That woman of his doesn't understand salads. She's great at a stew, but at a salad little Lila can give her points."

"The salad can wait!" said Tim, in a voice that

made her start. "I have to speak to you a moment. This way."

Entering, he motioned toward the back shop, and Miss Laughter, with wondering eyes, took the way he pointed out. Lila was the most good-natured creature in the world. Of course, if the lad really wanted anything, the salad would have to wait.

"I want to say, Miss Laughter—" Tim was controlling his voice as carefully as he could, but he could not keep the tremor out of it, "that this must stop."

"What must stop?" said the lady. "What do you mean, Tim Ten? You don't mean the business? You're not in trouble?"

Tim dismissed the business with a wave of the hand.

"This—this way of yours!" he said. "You must stop calling me your young man. You must stop seeming to appropriate me, and behaving as if there were some special tie between us. There is not, and you know there is not."

"Bless—my—stars—and—only we don't speak of them!" Miss Laughter looked at him wide-eyed. "What upon earth is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter; only I cannot have it, that's all. I must repeat, there is no bond between us, and there never can be any beyond that of simple civility and—and friendliness."

"Oh, well! We're to be friendly! Now, that's a great concession, I am sure."

She looked him over carefully.

"What has happened to my—to *the* young man?" she corrected herself.

"Have people been saying things to you?"

"I am not speaking of other people," said Tim. "I

am speaking of myself. I want you to acknowledge that there is nothing between us, that there never has been anything between us, that there never could be anything between us."

"Why," Miss Laughter trilled on the high note, "of course there is a bond between us, a gilt-edged bond, I call it. If you've forgotten the little affair of the Buffalo station, me young friend, I haven't! I owed you a good turn for that. I have tried to do you one. What are you giving us? I'll be switched if I know what you're driving at."

Tim looked at her in helpless, but stubborn silence, and she returned his gaze. Presently, a spark crept into her eyes.

"Oho!" she said softly. "Some of that, eh? Now I get you! You don't want your name to be paired off with mine, eh? You're ashamed of little Lila, are you, Mr. Timothy Tenterden, stationer? The man who sells pens in a two-for-a-cent little gone-to-sleep dog-hole like this is too good to associate with the star actress of the People's Peerless Proscenium Players, is he?"

"That's nonsense, and you know it!" said Tim gruffly.

"Is it? Why—" the lady's tone changed slightly—"Maybe I do know it, Tim. I don't really believe you are that sort; but if it isn't that—" She paused again, and spoke more slowly. "If it isn't that, it means just one thing. There is some one else!"

She looked keenly at the young man, saw him flush, and pale, and flush again, saw his eyes glow and darken, and being a clever woman, as well as a good-natured one, needed to see nothing more.

"Some one else!" she repeated slowly. "Ha! ha! ha!"

The octave rang out, perhaps a trifle forced—after all, it is seldom pleasant to be set aside and told to keep out of the way—but still hearty enough.

"And I've been interfering, eh? And I'd better keep out from under foot, eh? Come, I like frankness. Is it the pretty little girl that looks like a damask rose and sings like a blackbird? If it is, I will give you my blessing, T. T."

Tim looked at her with lips compressed and eyes full of sombre fire.

"All right! all right!" she said. "Lila doesn't force anybody to confide in her that doesn't want to. Lila's no fool; but she's a good sort!" she added, holding out her hand frankly. "Come, T. T., admit that she's a good sort! Honest, I meant to give you a lift. You don't want it, and there's an end of it. Shake hands!"

Tim took the proffered hand, and his grim look softened.

"You *are* a good sort, Miss Laughter!" he said. "I am sorry I was so—so hateful; but I have been tremendously worked up."

"Don't say another word!" said Lila Laughter. "I've been there myself. If I can do anything, command *me!* If I can't, mum's the word. Great last night, wasn't it? We shall clear fifty dollars, and I am booked for Tinkham and Corona next week and the week after. I'll rattle the dry bones a little yet, see if I don't!"

And with a nod and a laugh, she left the store.

Pity that Lina could not have heard this conversation. Pity that she only saw the two turn into the

store together. Her mother took her to task that evening for her pale cheeks and heavy air.

"You have been working too hard, my dear!" she said. "I want you to rest now a bit. I think you had best accept Mary's invitation and go and spend two or three weeks with her. A little change will do you good, Lina dear. We all lean on you too hard, and let you do too many things for us." She kissed her daughter's cheek affectionately, with a little anxious look.

Mrs. Chanter had thought a great deal about young Tenterden. He had not been at the house for some time now. Could it be—could it really be that this foolish woman had got him in her toils? She dismissed the thought as preposterous. She had seen his face when that sudden summons brought him to the stage the night before; had seen the bewilderment change to anger, deepen into disgust.

She had also, on various occasions watched the same face when it was turned on her daughter: watched with a pleasant warmth about her motherly heart. She liked the lad. Whatever Lina might be, Mrs. Chanter was not a goose.

A lovely evening came softly on, and Lina sat at her window, breathing the sweet air and trying to quiet the thoughts that hurried unquietly through her. Why should he not be happy? happy in the way that he wished? Surely, Miss Laughter was a good and kind woman. Every one said how cheerful and friendly she was. Lina hoped, she prayed, that he would have the happiness that he wanted. And she must keep herself busy and do all the good that God would allow her to do, while her life lasted. She did not want to live

to be old. It must be dreadful to be old. The sooner God would take us from this wicked world, the happier it surely was for us. She would go to see Mrs. Wibird to-morrow.

Hark! what was that? Something stirred outside the garden wall. Presently, very softly, a voice stole upon the silence, a singing voice, clear and vibrant.

"Oh, Shenandoah, where is thy daughter?
Oho! the rolling river!
Oh, Shenandoah, where is thy daughter?
Far away
On the wide Missouri!"

"He can sing!" said Lina, to herself. "He can sing! He is singing for joy in his new happiness!" And she shut the window.

Lina, Lina, you *are* a goose! There is no possibility of denying it. Is your ear so ill-attuned that you cannot hear the thrill of longing and passion and appeal in that voice?

Tim was singing to his love, where she sat at her window. He recognized the sweet profile against the light within. He hoped he might win her to speech, or at least to a look, a gesture of friendliness. She had shut the window. She had gone away. It was over.

CHAPTER XV

QUINTESSENTIAL

MEANTIME, while these things were going on in Cyrus village, how did matters stand at the Quintessence of Cyrus, half a mile to the north of the Street?

Mr. Tertius Quint had been passing the most uncomfortable days of his whole life. He said so, and doubtless thought so. His sister took occasion to demur gently, reminding him that in his youth he had spent some weeks in a Neapolitan prison, when he was fighting under Garibaldi.

"That," said the Squire, with dignity. "was entirely different!" adding after a moment's silence, "there are worse places than a prison. There, at least, one has privacy, and silence."

Miss Hippolyta sighed. No one could wonder at Brother's being disturbed; the house *was* noisy. It was difficult to imagine how one person could make so much noise, and such a variety of noises. The once-quiet house resounded with banging of doors (Eliza could not, it seemed, shut a door quietly!) with clicking and tapping of heels on polished floors, with tinkling and rattling of "bracelets, chains and ouches," above all with singing and high-pitched laughter. With the prospect of removal to the Mallow House, and of the forthcoming musicale, Miss Laughter's spirits, somewhat depressed during the first few days of her visit, rose to their natural high

pitch. She laughed at anything or nothing, partly for pleasure, partly for practice. Octave, trill, and octave again, rang through the house all day long. But even this was better than the snatches of song that frequently assailed the Squire's outraged ears.

"Oh, jiminy crack!" sang Miss Laughter, clicking down the stairs.

"Oh, jiminy crack, and blow me tight,
And won't we laugh and shout,
For it fills me heart with gay delight,
And it's Susan's Sunday out!"

"What do you know about this?" she asked gleefully, entering the dining room ten minutes later (and fully five minutes late for supper!) bearing a covered dish in her hands.

"What do you know about this?" she repeated, setting down the dish before the Squire with a flourish. "Say! I told your old fuddy duddy I was goin' to get supper, and she nearly threw a fit. We compromised on this; try it, Cousin Quint! See if 'tisn't good; I bet it is!"

Squire Quint, his eyebrows raised to the vanishing point, lifted the cover from the dish; at the odor which greeted his superciliously wrinkled nostrils, his aspect became a shade less austere.

"Ha! mushrooms!" he said.

Miss Hippolyta looked up hopefully; mushrooms were her brother's favorite delicacy.

"Heard you liked 'em!" laughed Lila. "Found 'em all a-blowin' and a-growin' on the hill up yonder." She broke into song.

"Come buy me little mushrooms, as fresh as can be!
You'll find them as dainty and delicate as me.
I'm the dairyman's Daisy,
And the folks all go crazy,
When they see me a-comin' with me mushrooms for tea!"

She sat down beaming, and began to clink and clatter with plate, knife and fork.

"Good, are they, Cousin Polly?" she asked eagerly.

"Most delicious!" said Miss Hippolyta. "Do I understand—did you cook these yourself, Eliza?"

"Bet your dear life I did! Nobody touches a mushroom while little Lila's round. Listen to this!

"'She can dance and she can sing,
She can act like anything,
She can laugh and she can look,
And, holy Moses! she can cook!'"

That's a valentine one of me gen'leman friends sent me last year. Cute, isn't it?"

The Squire bent on her a glance of mitigated majesty. The mushrooms were really beyond praise.

"Your skill in cookery is unquestionable!" he said; "but may I beg—since you have Quint blood in your veins—that you will insert the 't' in 'gentleman'?"

"La-ta-ta-*tee!*" Miss Laughter's voice trilled up to high C, causing Miss Hippolyta to drop her teaspoon. "How's that for high? But don't tell me you never had anything stronger than tea inserted in you, young feller!" Lila rallied him. "Was he a little bit of a rip when he was young, Cousin Polly? Just a ripplette, what? Gen-*tle*-man! there! is that better?

Sounds like Barnaby Rudge, don't it? Polly, put the ket-*tle* on!"

The Squire stared. "You—ah—read Dickens?" he inquired in a slightly different tone.

"Oh, I learned to read!" said Lila airily. "Nothing under three syllables sticks me. You wouldn't think it, would you? Why, me first part was the Marchioness, in the 'Old Curiosity Shop.' Like to see me do it?"

An instant, and she was sitting on the sideboard, swinging her heels, and gazing at her astonished host with an elfin twinkle which somehow—impossibly, yet actually—triumphed over the paint and powder and ringlets. She *was* Dick Swiveller's Marchioness, rags, elf-locks and all. Another instant and she was back in her seat. The whole thing was like a flash.

"Pity you couldn't play up Dick Swiveller!" she said composedly. "I don't hardly know where you could come in, unless it was the wicked Marquis in 'Two Cities,' and the trouble with that is, you ain't wicked. You are a beaut, though," she added; "no mistake about that; and just to keep the tears out of your sweet eyes, I'll take another mushroom. They *are* good, aren't they? Gee!" she gurgled mirthfully. "You ought to have seen Fuddy Duddy's face when I whisked the cream from under her nose. I believe she had it saved for her own supper!"

The Squire suffered acutely in these days. There was no doubt about that. It was not only the singing and laughing and clattering. The speech of the visitor was a constant anguish to him: Not only did she say "don't hardly" and "hadn't ought"; she said everything, it seemed, that he most abominated. She left

out, as we have seen, the "t" in gentleman; she said "ar'tic" for arctic, "guv'ment" for government, "auxillary" for "auxiliary." She had scarcely a "g" to her name, and her burr was like a buzz saw.

And yet, in spite of all these poignant annoyances, there was something, the Squire could not help realizing, something honest and friendly about the girl, that might—if one saw her on rare occasions, somewhere else than in one's own house—dispose one not altogether unkindly towards her.

While these thoughts were creeping in, in spite of himself, Lila was preparing her parting *coup,* which might easily have destroyed—only it didn't—these budding relentments. She was in Miss Polly's sitting room one day, whisking and flouncing about the room, to the great disturbance of that lady, who was trying to do her tambour work. It was a delightful room, I always thought, Miss Polly's sitting room, quiet and gentle and cheerful, like herself: brown, too, like herself, no dingy drab, but a bright, pleasant, robinlike brown. There was just enough brown in the chintz curtains, mingled with little touches of scarlet, berries or what not, for all the world like a robin's breast. Every article of furniture was perfect of its kind, the Sheraton chairs, the wonderful little ebony table, the fireplace with its Dutch tiles and its high fender. The mantelpiece ornaments were few but precious: two little silver statuettes brought over by the original Quint in his Mayflowering time; a pair of candelabra of exquisite design and lustre; one or two bits of priceless Spode and Lowestoft: but the chief glory of the room was the pastel portraits. There were half a dozen of them, or more, representing child Quints of the

early eighteenth century, lovely little girls in mob cap and pinner, this one holding a rose, that one a daisy, this one again caressing a bird; sturdy, manly little boy Quints, in ruffles and smallclothes. These portraits were the delight of everybody in Cyrus who had an eye for the beautiful. Among these exquisite things, as delicate in color and texture as an April morning, were scattered other portraits of more recent date. Among these was one upon which Miss Laughter suddenly pounced.

"What is this?" she cried. "I hadn't noticed this before, Cousin 'Polyta! I've been so bewitched by all those lovely brats—and I never shall forgive myself for not having been born a century before, so that I could have seen what a lovely brat *I* was—that I didn't notice it. *Who* is this—this *howling* swell?"

"That," said Miss Hippolyta primly, "is my brother."

It was a water color sketch of a young man, tall and slight, with martial bearing. He wore a white overcoat reaching to his ankles; a close-fitting, wide-skirted coat with three or four capes. In one hand he carried a white silk hat, in the other a slight ebony cane. The figure was that of an *élégant* of the early nineteenth century, graceful, dignified, possibly somewhat foppish, yet with character and authority in every line of the high-bred, aquiline face.

"Bless my stars and oh-we-never-mention-'ems!" cried Miss Laughter. "It is! It verily is Grandpa Monument before he turned into a fossil! Gee! that's great, Cousin 'Polyta! Say! don't you know, that's simply *great!* Look at the air of him! Why weren't

all the girls in the country after him? Why, he's a stunner!"

Miss Polly could not bring herself to say, "They were!" which was what she proudly thought in her heart. She simply said:

"The likeness is an excellent one. My brother was much admired."

"And none of 'em got him? He wouldn't smile on any of the little tootsy-pootsy things? I call that a shame now. Say, it *is* a shame that you two museum pieces must moulder away here, and no one to see you —unless they have to come all the way from Ahia to do it!"

She suddenly became thoughtful. "This is an awfully cute rig, too!" she said, half to herself. "What became of it, Cousin 'Polyta? I don't suppose he dyed it and wore it out as my poor dad would have had to. Not that he ever had any fine togs like this, poor old dad! Did you make it over into a spring coat for yourself, what?"

"The suit has been preserved," said Miss Hippolyta. "It is in one of the camphor chests in the attic. I should be sorry to destroy it."

"Right you are!" said Miss Laughter. "It would be a sinful shame. Camphor chests, eh? And who's this venerable Johnny in the dickey? Is he me great-grandfather, or what? He looks like a dissolute daisy, he does."

She went on from portrait to portrait, her comments now amusing, now horrifying Miss Hippolyta. Then she seemed to lose her interest in the subject, and declaring she was going to take a beauty snooze, clicked and rustled and warbled up to her own room.

It might have been an hour after this that the Squire came in from his afternoon walk. He had gone to the village for the mail and the newspaper, and had had a pleasant half hour at Bygood's, chatting with the young man there, who really seemed to be intelligent and to possess the rudiments of taste. The Squire had been, he thought, able to give the young man some points that might be of value to him. Whenever, in these deplorable days, one did chance upon an intelligent youth, one was bound, of course, to suggest such ideas as might, in short, induce——

As he closed the door after him, the Squire's meditations were brought to an abrupt end. The hall of the Quint mansion was a long and narrow one, extending the whole depth of the house, lighted from above by the staircase window. Advancing along this passage was a figure at sight of which the old man started and, with an involuntary gesture, laid his hand on his heart. A ghost was coming toward him, the ghost of his own youth. The white overcoat, slim-waisted, full-skirted, with its many capes, the envy of every young man of his day and set; the white silk hat, the very cane—*what* was this?

As he stood spellbound, a shrill, gay laugh rang out from under the silk hat.

"By Jove, you know!" said a high-pitched voice. "I believe I've fetched you, Cousin Quint. Have I got the right swagger, what? Did we twirl the cane this way, and then a little twist to our moustache *this* way? Come, say I've got you! And now let's see what it does to Miss Polly!"

The old Squire stood very still, leaning against the

door. Speech was, for the moment, impossible to him. Silently, he turned into his library and shut the door. Thither, in a moment, came to him Miss Polly, in a soft flurry of agitation. She was so sorry! she was so mortified! She could not believe that such a thing had happened! The things should be taken off instantly, instantly, brother! She begged his forgiveness. The chest should never have been left unlocked; but how could she imagine——

Her distress was so great that the Squire, collecting himself, reassured her. It was of no consequence, he said; annoying, but of no consequence. She would do well to tell the young woman not to meddle with things. She was a vulgarian, and possibly knew no better. She——

But here was the young woman herself, full of honest concern. Say, she had no idea of upsetting Cousin Polly like that. She was awfully sorry. She'd take the things right upstairs this minute.

"You didn't mind, did you, Squire? Say, I did pull it off, didn't I? After all, I am a Quint, you see!"

After all, she was a Quint. Something in this episode, it is difficult to say just what, may possibly have touched the Squire. Whether it was the sight of his own youth, proud and brilliant, thus brought back to him for a moment in the person of this kinswoman who, whatever her enormities, could, it seemed, on occasion strike the air and attitude of a Quint, even of the quintessence of Quintery—whether it was this or the recognition of her evidently honest and sincere repentance, who can say? At all events, the parting in-

terview the next day was different from what the Squire had meant it should be. He had had, in moments of special annoyance, visions of himself opening the front door and saying, "Go! I wish you well, but this door is closed to you in future." He had even, in one moment of peculiar exasperation—it was when she had taken his pet cane to show him how they hunted weasels in Ahia—had a vision of himself thundering through the closing door, "Wretched woman, begone!" But now, things had quite suddenly changed. Actually—Miss Hippolyta could hardly believe this—actually, when the moment came for the parting interview, Eliza had been summoned to the library, the door of which had been strenuously closed against her ever since she entered the house. Miss Laughter was fully aware of this, and entered the room with much interest.

"Say!" she said, "I never thought I'd get a squint in here. Awfully good of you to let me in, Cousin Quint. Say, you've had it in for me, haven't you, ever since I came? You can't stand me, can you? I don't wonder a mite, seeing what we are, though I can stand you first rate. I admire you, you see. I think you're no end, and it's mighty white of you to let me stay a week, hating me like you do. Say, this is a dandy room, ain't it? My crickey! what books!"

The Squire's face had undergone several changes during this speech, softening, hardening—her speech was *impossible!*—softening again.

"Sit down, Eliza!" he said. "It is true that our tastes are widely divergent, but there is no reason why we should not part friends. I wish you well!" he said, almost benignantly, "extremely well. I could wish

that you might, while still in this neighborhood, as I understand you are to be here for some days, endeavor to conform more to the standards set, successfully I have always thought, by Cyrus ladies. Your Cousin Hippolyta, Mrs. Judge Peters, the ladies of our excellent pastor's family, all these could give you points in demeanor, which would, in the eyes of persons of taste, tend to the amelioration of your—er—in short, bearing. I feel bound to say this, since you have Quint blood in your veins. We will now pass to other topics. It has occurred to me and to your Cousin Hippolyta, that, since the death of your parents, it is possible that you may have occasionally had occasion for —er—in short—er—funds. Funds!" the Squire repeated. "If you should at any time find yourself in any degree embarrassed, I trust that you would turn at once to me, as the head of your mother's family. Of your father's family and the circumstances in which its members are placed, I know nothing, but as a Quint, you have claims on your kinsman, which he is—er—is glad to acknowledge."

The Squire had prepared this little speech beforehand, or something tolerably like it; as he delivered it, he found himself softening into something more nearly approaching friendliness than he would have thought possible under the circumstances. He expected it to be kindly received, but what was his horror, his speechless and unspeakable horror, when Miss Laughter, rising from her seat, flung her arms round his neck, and declaring that he was the sweetest old thing that ever came over the pike, kissed him soundly on both cheeks and burst into tears! Poor Squire! He could only gasp and call helplessly, "Hippolyta!"

but his voice of anguish brought Miss Polly scuttling from her room. No words were needed. His gesture was all too eloquent. She laid a firm, though gentle hand on the sobbing Lila.

"Come, my dear!" she said. "Come with me! Your cousin must not be disturbed!"

But Lila made a gesture of protest.

"I'll stop!" she said. "I didn't mean to cry, but, honestly, I had to. Now I've got to say a word, if it's my last on earth. Look here!"

She faced the other two squarely. Miss Hippolyta had moved to her brother's side, as if to protect him from annoyance. It was the wren hovering over the eagle.

"I've got to tell you something!" Lila went on. "When I came here, I was down and out. Down—and—out!" she repeated. "I'd been thrown, and I couldn't get on me feet again. I said to meself, 'There's folks in Cyrus are kin to me!' I said, 'There's the house mother was born in, and folks living there. They may be fuddy duddies, or they may be highbrows, but I've a right to a bite and a bed there, and I'll take it! I'll show 'em!' I said. I came here feeling that way—see? Bluff; bunk; whatever you like to call it. Then—you opened the door, Cousin—" she looked at the Squire—"and—and you were highbrow all right! That set me going, see? 'I'll show *him!*' I said. 'I'll show him Quints ain't all highbrow!' That was the way it took me, you see. *You* understand, Squire!"

She seemed to have no doubt of his understanding. Miss Polly, looking up appalled, saw him bend his handsome head, and felt her world totter around her.

In some way unimaginable to her, he did understand. His smile was grim, but it was an undeniable smile.

"You certainly have a sense of humor, kinswoman!" he said.

"That's it! that's it!" cried Lila eagerly. "So have you! I understand you. If I'd have been born here——" She looked around her. "If I'd have had all these books—gee! what books! say! it puts me off me nut just looking at 'em! if I'd have had——"

"Omit the 'have', Eliza!" said the Squire kindly. "'If I had had the books' is what you mean to say. I wish you had had them, my—my dear."

"And then," Lila hurried on, wiping her eyes again, "you were good to me! You were white, and me like sour currants to you every time I opened me lips! I knew it. I was ashamed, and yet every time I looked at you, off I'd go worse than ever. It was—so—funny——"

She began to laugh and cry together. The Squire, rising hastily, cast an appealing look at his sister.

"Come, my child!" said Miss Polly.

She led the sobbing Lila away, closing the door gently after her.

The carriage was at the door. The trunk bumped down the stairs. Samantha Bullion extended a hand of mingled forbearance, relief and admiration. Miss Polly kissed her kinswoman with genuine kindliness, and should certainly see her while she was at the Mallow House. Handkerchiefs were waved and—oh, wonder, oh, past belief!—as Lila looked out of the cab window, there in the doorway, behind Miss Polly's fluttering little figure, was the tall, austere one of the

Squire, with a hand raised, if not in benediction, at least in kindly urbanity.

"And we didn't have to whitewash, after all!" said Miss Polly, to herself, as she sat down with a sigh in her armchair.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MALLOW HOUSE

AT the Mallow House, the advent of Miss Lila Laughter was awaited with some trepidation. The Boarders were divided in sentiment. Mrs. Scatter, who for some twenty years had played the part of a young and admired widow, thought it would do them good to be livened up a bit. Her sister, Miss Pringle, a severe lady in bands and side combs, who confided to every new acquaintance that sister and she had little in common, but that she for one knew her duty, was of the opposite opinion. It would be a dark day for the Mallow House, she observed, when a play-actress came to reside there. The Tone of the house would suffer, let her tell them that. She could only hope that its reputation would not be permanently injured. The Misses Caddie, who were nothing if not refined, feared there was something in this, and shook their ringlets sorrowfully; but Mrs. Bagley, blond, brisk, and smiling, inclined to Mrs. Scatter's opinion.

"And anyhow," she said cheerfully, "I understand she is to be here only a week. She can't do much harm in that time."

Miss Pringle shook her head solemnly.

"Much," she said, "may happen in a week. I only hope——"

"Oh, indeed and truly yes!" cried Mrs. Sophia

Sharpe eagerly. She had thought she would make a "two-minute run-in" half an hour before, and was drinking in every word that was said, especially every derogatory word, after her manner.

"Why, a week—why, some folks can do more harm in an hour than others in their whole lifetime. I must say I hold with Miss Pringle. When I think of the *havoc* this person has wrought already in Cyrus village—there! I'm like the Psalmist! my bones turn to water."

No one thought Mrs. Sharpe was in the least like the Psalmist. She was generally regarded with disfavor at the Mallow House, and her frequent "runs-in" were considered highly intrusive by the Lady Boarders; but at such a crisis as this—if the woman did really know anything——

"What havoc has she wrought?" Mrs. Scatter asked incredulously. "She's showy and stagey, of course, but she seems jolly and good-natured. I rather like her!"

"Oh! jolly! I grant you that!" Mrs. Sharpe's nose was very sharp indeed as she poked it forward. "I grant you she is jolly. As to the *source* of her jollity, I say nothing. Lawth should I be indeed to give a bad name to a place that has stood as high in Cyrus as what Bygood's has, but——"

Mrs. Sharpe paused, and drew her shawl about her with a dramatic shudder—"I know of *one* person who will never darken them doors again while she is in it."

(It was not to be wondered at that Mrs. Sharpe had decided to avoid the book store. Coming in one day while Timothy Tenterden was absent, she was making her way into the back shop, "just to see if all was

right," as she put it to herself, when she was pounced upon by Miss Laughter, demanding what she could do for her. The visitor stammering something about pens, a trayful was instantly produced, with "Take your pick, Auntie!" Demurring at the high price of "Falconets," she was jocularly adjured to "go along!" "Cut *your* eye teeth all right, haven't you, old lady? Trouble is, I've cut mine too, see?")

"The young man I consider a poor creature. He cannot say his soul is his own, nor I don't know that it would be the truth; she has *taken possession.* She is in there at all hours of the day or—" She was about to add "night," but remembered that Bygood's closed at six, like the other shops.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Sharpe?" asked little Mrs. Bagley. "I think if a thing is to be said at all, it had better be said plain, and not go about and about."

A general murmur of assent greeted the remark. They were getting very tired of Mrs. Sharpe, and it was near dinnertime.

"It's because it's so *terrible!*" cried the lady, "that I am lawth to believe it. I say *nothing,* nothing whatever! I only ask you, ladies, if you know what goes on in that back shop nowadays?"

She paused for an instant to draw breath, then hurried on without waiting for an answer. "It was bad enough when he and Lina Chanter were philandering in there, reading poetry and drinking tea—I saw them through the back window, having occasion to pass that way. It was no way for a pastor's daughter to behave, and I felt it my duty to speak to Mrs. Chanter about it, but was not received in what *I* call a Christian spirit. Well! but it *was* tea, and nothing more, to the

best of my knowledge and belief. But I ask you, ladies and temperance women, is it likely to be no more than tea that brings the men out of that back shop *flushed in their faces?* I do not say that Very Jordano was unsteady in his walk. I do not say it. I hope he was not, but be that as it may! It is not for me to set in judgment over my neighbors, specially when my pastor refuses to interfere. How he can reconcile it to his conscience *as* a pastor—but— Well, this thing I *must* say, and none can deny, that Marshy Wibird, when she heard that this Laughter woman was coming here to her brother's house, took to her bed and there remains. Now I must be going, ladies. I have stayed far longer than I had any intentions of doing, but there! I love Cyrus, and I don't know whether my blood boils more, or runs colder, at the thoughts of what's going on here. I wish you good morning. I suppose you have heard that poor Emmeline Tooth is going into a decline on accounts of the rig her husband is running with this woman. If I was one that was inclined to spread abroad, I could tell you things would make your eyes stand out, Mrs. Scatter. Driving her the length of Cyrus Street in broad daylight, behind them two black hosses of his! I call it an open scandal, and she cocked up there——"

At this moment, a door banged. A high-pitched voice was heard in the vestibule.

"Well, well, well! Here we are again. What do you know about that?"

Exit Mrs. Sharpe, in a manner which I confess I heard described later as "slinking." Enter, clinking, rustling and trilling, Miss Lila Laughter. I leave the tableau to the reader's imagination.

Mr. Mallow emerged from his private sitting room, rubbing his hands.

"Good day! Good day, Miss Laughter! I am pleased to welcome you to the Mallow House. Your room's all ready for you, ben ready since morning. Dinner bell's just going to ring. Make you acquainted with my Lady Boarders! Mis' Scatter, Miss Pringle, Mis' Bagley, Miss Ruby'n' Pearl Caddie! You would like to take off your bunnit before dinner. This way, ma'am, this way!"

Miss Laughter took in the little group with one comprehensive glance.

"Howdy, all?" she said.

She extended a plump hand, which was taken by the ladies in turn with varying degrees of cordiality. Mrs. Scatter gave it a friendly squeeze and hoped they should be good neighbors. Miss Pringle's hand was like a thin slice of cold veal, Lila thought to herself. She gave it a hearty squeeze, however, and said, "You bet!" to the group in general.

"I expect you all to love me a lot!" she said. "I am real lovable, come to know me. But *he* won't love me," with a toss of her head towards Mr. Mallow, "if I'm late to dinner the first day! After you, Mr. Landlord! You lead the way and I'll follow."

And she clicked and rustled and clinked upstairs, exclaiming as she went that this certainly did appear to be A No. 1.

The Mallow House certainly was, and I am glad to say still is, the pleasantest hostelry that one can imagine. There have been some recent alterations, I believe, but at the time of which I write, it had not been

altered for a good many years, and everything wore an air of mellow stability. One entered the hall to find one's self opposite the counterlike desk where Mr. Mallow or his lieutenant, Billy, was wont to receive visitors. On the right of the hall was a large open fireplace, where a cheerful fire burned whenever the temperature allowed it. On the left was the parlor, where all the boarders gathered of an evening, and where the ladies spent much of their time. It was a pleasant room, with a tinkling piano in one corner, a centre table on which were displayed various photograph albums filled with the portraits of bygone boarders, a history of Cyrus and Environs, and a portentous lamp with a shade which retained most of the light supposed to penetrate it; a bookcase containing an encyclopedia, the works of Mr. E. P. Roe and Mrs. Mary J. Holmes, a county history, and various other works of local interest, beside the Mallow family Bible. Behind the parlor was the dining room, a cheerful apartment where the sun seemed to shine more or less all day.

This could be said even more truly of Mr. Mallow's private sitting room, which lay behind the desk space, and communicated with the dining room on one side and on the other with the "offices," as Mr. Mallow proudly called them, meaning the kitchen, laundry, etc.

As a rule, persons did not enter Mr. Mallow's sanctum without a special invitation. I do not know whether it was with or without this that Miss Laughter found her way thither after that first dinner. There she was, however, looking about her and pronouncing this "a little bit of all right, and no mistake."

"This is your sanctum, is it?" She turned friendly eyes on her host. "Well, I must say you show your taste. I call this a lovely room. Say, I can sit in any one of these chairs, can't I?"

She plumped herself down in one, a most inviting rocker. All the chairs, by the way, were rockers, except the spindle-legged one by the little desk in the corner. All were rockers, all were comfortable. One's instinct was to try each in turn to see which was the most comfortable. This Miss Laughter now proceeded to do, thereby disengaging, as she moved, the tidies that protected the back of each one. It was always my belief that so many tidies were never accumulated in one room as in Mr. Mallow's sitting room. They were all offerings, I believe, of lady boarders. They were of every possible size, shape, color and material. There were crocheted tidies, knitted tidies, burnt leather tidies, crewelwork, Kensington stitch and chenille tidies, and many more beside. They overflowed from the backs to the arms of the chairs. They were carefully secured with a peculiar clasp. They were always fresh and dainty, for Mr. Mallow was a precisian in these matters, and no tidy was suffered to remain that could not be washed or cleansed.

"I ain't stingy, nor I ain't dingy!" the good man was wont to say.

It was a ribbon tidy in which Miss Laughter had caught one of the back hooks of her gown; pink satin ribbon, braided together in strands and finished off with tassels, an elaborate affair, a Christmas offering of Mrs. Scatter's. Mrs. Scatter knew that she must never wear anything but black herself, because no

color set off so well her brunette comeliness, but she knew also that a touch of rose color somewhere about her was becoming, so most of her fancy work was pink.

"Say, you've got me hooked for sure!" cried Miss Laughter. "Want to make sure of me, don't you? Thanks!" as Mr. Mallow, with deft fingers released her from bondage. "I'll take that other chair with the leather one, or I shall be doing it again. Well, Mr. Mallow, I expect to have a right cozy time here with you. I must say this is my size. Cousin Tertius has a beautiful house, no doubt about that, but honest, I have had to sit so straight for a week it seems as if my backbone would turn fossil with the rest of the things there. They have been real good to me, though," she added thoughtfully. "I am the limit, you know, from their point of view. Say, those are dandy curtains! What are they made of?"

Mr. Mallow beamed. He was proud of his curtains. These were also an offering. For years the Misses Caddie had begged and hoarded silk scraps. These, cut into narrow strips and carefully sewed together, had been knitted by their skilful fingers into a gleaming rainbow fabric, striking to say the least.

"Ain't they handsome?" said the good man. "I do take pride in them, Miss Laughter. They were a present from the Miss Caddies that you saw before dinner. They're elegant ladies, been with me ten years or more. Spend their winters here, but go home, come spring. I am fortunate in my boarders!" he added gravely. "There is not one but is refined and ladylike, or gentleman, as the case may be. We never have no trouble here. If there's any disputes or the

like of that, I never hear of them. I always say one thing. If anything comes up, I say,

'If folks don't conjingle
They no need to mingle.'

That takes care of it all, you see, and they so understand it."

"Good for you!" said Miss Laughter thoughtfully. "Got it all down fine, haven't you? That's about what life comes to, isn't it? Say, you must have a dandy housekeeper, or matron, or whatever you call her, to keep all this up so nice."

Mr. Mallow rubbed his hands and shook his head decidedly.

"No, *ma'am!*" he said. "All the matron and housekeeper there is here sets before you. I have a cook. She knows her place and keeps it. There's girls, of course, and she has more or less say-so about them, but nobody keeps this house, only Marsh Mallow. No housekeeper or matron in mine! I have always said, and I shall always say, 'I don't want no woman gormineering over me!'"

Miss Laughter surveyed him approvingly, then held out her hand.

"Shake!" she said. "Same here! I always tell 'em, I know when I'm well off." She warbled an adaptation of a popular song of the day.

"Not for Li! Not for Li!
Wishful smiler, not for Lila!
Not for Li, not for Li!
Just you ask her, she'll say why!"

"I should have to sew on his buttons!" she added by way of explanation. "That I couldn't stand!"

(This shows that Miss Laughter had never loved. One of the first things a woman wants, when her heart is touched, is to sew on the buttons of the loved one. Poor little Lina would have sewn buttons all over—but no matter!)

"Is that so?" said Mr. Mallow genially. "Then we shall get on first rate. I tell you honest, I like your looks, Miss Laughter. I admire you, I do so, and come to find that there's none of this—well, what I call languishing, about you, why, I say right out, why, let's make friends! The longer you stay under this roof, the better I shall be pleased!"

CHAPTER XVII

CROESUS DOLOROSUS

THE smallest room I knew in Cyrus was Mr. Chanter's study, or as he called it, his book-closet. His friend Samuel Pepys, the minister was wont to say, always spoke of his book-closet, and that was much larger than this. The room cannot have measured more than eight feet by ten. If it were larger, Mr. Chanter said, he could not have reached the book-shelves without leaving his seat, a manifest inconvenience. The walls were entirely lined with books, save for the spaces occupied by the tiny fireplace and the two doors. One of the doors opened into the family sitting room; the other, a low and narrow one, squeezed in between two tall bookcases, gave access to the garden. This little door played an important part in the pastor's life. Through it came, from time to time, everybody in the village who was in "trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity." They all brought their troubles to "the Elder," laid before him their tangled skeins of life, and he straightened them out as best he could, with never-failing patience, with the wisdom and judgment born of long quiet years spent with a hand on the pulse of Humanity. What sorrowing hearts, what souls crushed under affliction or struggling against injustice, had passed through that narrow door, who could say? Or who could count those who had left it cheered and comforted, with strength and purpose to take up cheer-

fully once more the burden of life? Suffice it to say that—with one or two exceptions—it was freely opened to all who came.

Mr. Chanter sat at his desk one day, receiving a caller. The shabby swivel chair was turned away from the desk, on which lay his half-written sermon. It was Saturday. Mrs. Chanter did wish people wouldn't come to see him on Saturday, but as the minister pointed out, trouble and adversity did not know the days of the week apart. He was in his working rig, a gray "army dressing gown," dating back to the Civil War, at the close of which these garments were sold at such low prices that the minister's mother, like many others, laid in a stock of them for family use. It was an unsympathetic garment, reaching scarcely to the knee on a man of average height like the minister: scant, too, and adorned only by a binding of green braid and a green woolen cord and tassel. There was a patch on one elbow, a neat darn on the other. The rest of the costume was in keeping; trousers and boots liberally and variously patched, linen frayed and mended; but all shining with washing and brushing and loving care. Such was the minister in his workaday garb.

The visitor certainly formed a striking contrast. Mr. Augustine Tooth sat on the edge of his chair in the uneasy attitude which seemed most natural to him. He was clad in broadcloth of the glossiest and finest; his tailor had pleaded passionately for tweeds, as far more suitable for morning, but to this pass Mr. Tooth could not bring himself; his embroidered shirtfront was adorned with ruby studs; his necktie, a chaste combination of crimson and purple satin, displayed a

scarfpin to match, surrounded by diamonds; his watch chain and his opal ring might have drawn tears from her of Sheba. In one hand he held a gold-headed cane, in the other a silk hat, at which he glanced now and then with what might be called humble pride. A silk hat had been the object of his highest admiration ever since he could remember. He had little thought——

"Lovely weather we are having!" Mr. Chanter was saying blandly. "I trust Mrs. Tooth is entirely recovered from her indisposition?"

Mr. Tooth sighed. "The weather is elegant!" he replied. "Cyrus appears to me to be specially favored in the matter of elegant weather. Mrs. Tooth," he added, "is not at all what I could wish! not at all what I could wish! In point of health and spirits!" he added hastily, seeing the minister's look of surprise. "In point of fact, she is—but we will come to that presently. I wish first—in fact, I called specially to consult you about her subscriptions."

"Her subscriptions?" repeated the minister. "Yes, Mr. Tooth! what about them?"

Mr. Tooth cleared his throat delicately.

"It is far from my wish," he said, "to interfere in any way with Mrs. Tooth's expenses. I have made her an allowance which—er—er—in short, which I hope is liberal. I may add that Judge Peters considered it so at the time when we were arranging matters. It is my wish that she should use this allowance; use it, in short, up, Mr. Chanter. Mrs. Tooth is a woman of kind heart, sir, and benevolent impulses. She has always been in the habit of subscribing to various good causes. I do not doubt that she has con-

tinued these subscriptions since we moved to Cyrus." He looked up inquiringly.

"Oh, yes." Mr. Chanter nodded. "I have had several lately. Mrs. Tooth appears to be interested in all good causes."

Mr. Tooth passed his hand across his forehead.

"Mr. Chanter," he said, "as to the amount of these subscriptions, now. Would it be—er—er—in point of fact, irregular, if I should ask you, for example, what she subscribed to the foreign missions of our denomination?"

"I see no objection," the minister replied slowly. "Husband and wife, you know, a united couple like you and Mrs. Tooth—I see no impropriety in telling you—" He drew a notebook toward him, and opened it. "Yes!" he said, "here we have it. Tuesday; that was yesterday, wasn't it? Mrs. Emmeline Tooth, one dollar."

"Oh, dear! dear!" Mr. Tooth rose and made a motion as if to pace the little room, but finding it unadapted for such exercise, he sat down again, nearer the edge of the chair than ever. "This is—is worse than I had thought, Mr. Chanter! Would you—" Mr. Tooth became agitated and passed his hand over his forehead several times. "I had better explain!" he said at length. "There was a time, Mr. Chanter, and a very recent time it was, as is known to you, when a dollar would have been all that Mrs. Tooth and I could possibly subscribe to foreign missions. Fifty cents apiece, sir, was, according to our budget in those days, a liberal subscription. But—but now, things are different. I am possessed, as you know, of large—I may say to you, Mr. Chanter, of e-normous means.

The burden of them—but no matter; I will not go into that. The thing is that Mrs. Tooth cannot seem to realize this. A dollar still seems to her a large sum. She is greatly distressed when I suggest a larger expenditure. I have reason to think—I speak with the confidence of parishioner to pastor—that the greater part of her allowance is preserved in—in point of fact, in stockings. Now, Mr. Chanter, my wish is in some way to bring about a different state of things, without annoying or distressing Mrs. Tooth."

"Yes!" said Mr. Chanter, sympathetically. "I see your point, Mr. Tooth. It is a delicate one; I fully appreciate it."

"I was sure you would!" cried Mr. Tooth. "I felt sure that you could advise me in this matter; advise and—and help. Mr. Chanter, could you not—would it not be possible simply to add a couple of cyphers to this subscription, for example?"

"A couple of cyphers?" repeated Mr. Chanter, with a puzzled look.

"Yes, Mr. Chanter! One dollar, really, you know, for a person of Emmeline's means, is—is ridic'lous, sir. I should wish to make it a hundred dollars. Now, without annoying Mrs. Tooth, could you not, or could I not, add a couple of cyphers to the—in point of fact, to the subscription?"

The minister turned aside and passed in turn his hand over his kind, rosy face.

"There are difficulties in the way of that, Mr. Tooth," he said kindly. "You see, Mrs. Tooth paid her subscription in a check. If you or I altered it, we should lay ourselves open to the charge of forgery, which would not become either of us."

Poor Mr. Tooth was overcome.

"Oh, oh, oh!" he stammered. I never thought—I never realized! I beg you will forgive me, Mr. Chanter. I was so anxious, it did not occur to me."

"No harm done, no harm done!" said the minister cheerfully. "A minister should be something of a man of business, although I believe he is seldom considered so!" he added with a rueful smile. "But as to this, now; surely it is easily arranged. You could give me another check, you know, Mr. Tooth, signing your own name to it, and I could simply add it to Mrs. Tooth's subscription, or to your own very liberal one, as you wished."

"Oh, to hers, to hers!" said Augustine Tooth. "It is Emmeline's account that I wish to increase. Expenditure is very painful to her, very painful indeed, Mr. Chanter. I would save her this pain, and at the same time have her make such a subscription as is suitable. I am sure you take my meaning."

"Perfectly! perfectly!" said Mr. Chanter. "Do not be distressed, Mr. Tooth. I think the matter may be easily arranged."

"I thank you!" said Augustine Tooth. "I thank you heartily, Mr. Chanter. I feel that my confidence in you has been amply rewarded, sir. And if I might suggest—let this plan be carried out in all my wife's subscriptions. Multiply them by ten, sir! multiply them by ten, and send the bill to me!"

Mr. Chanter was about to reply, when a sound was heard outside, the sound of steps upon the gravel walk leading to the garden door. It would seem that the minister recognized the step. He laid his hand on the visitor's arm and made a gesture of silence. Mr.

Tooth, his mouth half open, his eyes very round, sat motionless. The step approached, and a knock fell upon the door. At the same time a high, wheezing cough was heard. Mr. Tooth had not lived in Cyrus long enough to recognize this as an announcement of the presence of Mrs. Sophia Sharpe. The minister sat like a statue, his hand still on the visitor's arm. The knock was repeated, the handle of the door was softly turned and found to be bolted. The steps retreated, and silence fell. Mr. Chanter ran his hands through his hair and murmured something about being a miserable sinner.

"You were about to make a remark, Mr. Tooth!" he said.

Mr. Tooth did not immediately reply. He was looking at the arm that lay in juxtaposition to his own. He saw the patch and the material under it. His eyes traveled over the gray army dressing-gown. He had worn one himself most of his life. Emmeline did not patch as neatly as this. His present dressing gown was of sapphire blue velvet lined with gold-colored brocade. His tailor called it a "sumshous" lounging robe. From the dressing gown, his eyes wandered about the little room, scanning the worn carpet, darned and patched as neatly as the gray flannel elbow, the discolored walls, the shabby books, the corner where the ceiling had fallen. A china basin was set under it to catch the droppings from the leaking roof. They were falling now, with slow precision, a tinkling splash, a rhythmic pause, a splash again. How natural it seemed! Only at Tupham, they had had no china basin and had had to use one of their few saucepans to catch the drops. From all these things, Mr.

Tooth's eyes came back to the pastor's shabby figure and his worn, kindly face. He spoke suddenly, out of the fullness of a gentle heart.

"Mr. Chanter," he said, "can't I do something for you?"

The minister stared at him in amazement. "For me?" he repeated.

"I've been poor all my life!" cried Augustine Tooth. "Oftentimes I didn't know where the next cent was coming from. Sometimes we could have meat once a week, and sometimes twice. I had a dressing gown like yours—that's what brought this all up to me, and —and a leak in my roof, and all. And now look at me! What I feel is, it's a shame, sir, and I wish you'd let me do something. Furnish the house, what say? Do it all up tasty, as a minister's house ought to be; have all these books bound nice and handsome, red morocco, or the like of that! What do you say, Elder?"

The homely word slipped out unawares. Mr. Tooth considered "pastor" more refined. He had tried once to say "priest," but had rejected it as unsuitable and popish.

What *could* Mr. Chanter say? He was deeply touched; but he had a strong sense of humor, and with his appreciation of the kindness came a momentary vision of his house, his dear shabby, comfortable house, transmogrified as Gaylord's had been, by the touch of a modern upholsterer. His books! his precious old brown calf Tacitus, his Milman Horace, a legacy from his dear old college professor, the set of the early Fathers, picked up for a song at an old book store—fancy these in red morocco! Tertullian might pos-

sibly flame out in it; it would suit his heathen savagery.

He collected himself and turned his kind eyes on his visitor, who, eager and agitated, seemed on the point of toppling off the chair which supported so very small a part of his anatomy.

"My dear friend!" he said, "my dear neighbor, what —what a good fellow you are, Tooth! Give me your hand! I appreciate this more than I can say. It is the wish of a good heart, sir, of a good heart, and I shall never forget that you have wished to do this."

"Then you consent?" stammered Mr. Tooth.

"No, not that. I cannot consent, because you see it really isn't necessary. We are not used to luxuries. We have every necessary comfort, and a great many luxuries," he made haste to add, "a great many. But the kind of luxury which your present financial condition renders perhaps almost inevitable would not be suitable to us, nor to our scheme of life. You will see that, Friend Tooth, if you think it over a little; but I shall not forget, sir, I shall not forget this piece of friendliness. Now let us go back to Mrs. Tooth. You tell me that you are anxious about her health and spirits. I am sorry. Suppose you tell me a little about that; that is, if you wish to do so."

Mr. Tooth drew a long breath and opened and shut his eyes several times.

"It would be a great relief, sir;" he said. "It would be an e-normous relief. My boosum, Mr. Chanter, is burdened. To un— to, in short, to *un*burden it to you would be, I repeat, an e-normous relief."

"Put down your hat and stick," said Mr. Chanter comfortably. "Sit back in your chair, man. You

look as if you were a school boy, and I your head-master—with the cane around the corner," he added, with a laugh. "I am only a plain family man, Mr. Tooth, but of course in my profession I have had more or less experience in the problems and perplexities of this mortal life. Unburden yourself, my good friend, by all manner of means!"

"You are very good, sir;" said Mr. Tooth. "I cannot disguise it from myself, that Emmeline—I would say Mrs. Tooth—is in a poor way. The change in circumstances has been hard for her to bear. I had hoped it would be the reverse!" cried the poor gentleman. "She has worked hard, Emmeline has, all her life, living in a small way until I married her, and after that perhaps even in a smaller. We were the choice of each other's youth, sir, and we were prepared *to* live in a small way. But it was very small indeed, I do assure you, Mr. Chanter. It was very small indeed." His eyes wandered to the leaky ceiling and the patched carpet. "Emmeline worked day and night to keep things together, and she formed the habit, sir, of saving. More than that; she came to dread spending. There! that, I think, is the root of the matter. She came to dread spending. When she had to untie the knot in that poor little stocking of hers—" Mr. Tooth's voice faltered. He drew out a magnificent silk handkerchief and blew his nose with some emotion, Mr. Chanter looking out of the window the while, kindly. "Honestly, sir, it seemed more than she could bear, and it was more than I could bear either," he said simply. "We—we are an attached couple, Mr. Chanter."

Mr. Chanter nodded sympathetically.

"Of course you are. Excellent people! excellent

people! Well, Mr. Tooth, I can perfectly understand that the change to affluence, I may almost say to unbounded affluence, would be a great shock to Mrs. Tooth. She is, I imagine, of a timid and apprehensive nature."

"Oh, very much so! very much so indeed, sir, I assure you." Mr. Tooth shook his head in earnest asseveration. "It seems to her dreadful. I do not speak so much of the large expenditures, subscriptions and that sort of thing, you know; those I can—in point of fact, conceal from her! 'Let not thy right hand know'; you are familiar with the passage, sir; but of what could—what might, in my present scale of means, be considered small ones. I have a taste, Mr. Chanter, for—in short, for *bric-à-brac.*" Mr. Tooth omitted the final "c," and finding the word much to his taste, repeated it. "For *bric-à-brac.* I occasionally, when my business takes me to the city, make some purchase. There is a shop that I occasionally visit, devoted entirely to what its proprietor calls objy dar. The expression is French, sir. I occasionally, I say, visit this—not exactly emporium, but you take my meaning—and make some purchase for the adornment of our home. We have a beautiful home, sir. You have only seen the reception rooms, but it is my desire to make the whole mansion a temple of taste, Mr. Chanter. These purchases seem to fill my poor wife with terror. They distress her, sir. She sheds tears over them. I—I question whether it is right for me to cause her this grief; and yet, Mr. Chanter, it is a great pleasure to me, sir, and it would seem an innocent one. My means being so—so extraordinarily large as they appear to be—Judge Peters urges me to expenditure.

He says, why should I roll up money faster than it is rolling up of its own accord? I cannot live up to my income, Mr. Chanter, and if I did, I believe my poor wife would die." He looked anxiously at the minister, who appeared to consider the subject seriously.

"I see your difficulty," he said at last, slowly and sympathetically. "The occasional purchase of ornaments," he avoided the French expressions in which his visitor evidently took a gentle pride—"would seem an entirely harmless one, and I see no reason why you should abstain from it."

"Especially," cried Mr. Tooth, "as the proprietor seems to be always in difficulties. He appeals to me, Mr. Chanter. The other day he asked me, with tears in his eyes, to purchase a—in short—a pig, carved out of some semi-precious stone. I think he called it beryl. The price, sir, was large, for a mantel ornament, and especially for one in so humble a shape. I paid two hundred dollars for it, but he assured me that it was less than what it cost him, and that he had bills to meet, his wife in the hospital—" Mr. Tooth drew out his handkerchief and wiped his brow nervously. "There was a terrible scene at home over that pig, sir. I will not recall it—I will not recall it! I have put it away in a cupboard with a number of other similar articles. My aim is to live at peace!"

"If such purchases were to take a domestic turn?" hinted the minister gently. "Something that Mrs. Tooth, who apparently has no taste for—er—ornaments, might find useful in her household? Table silver, for example?"

Mr. Tooth groaned.

"There is more table silver, sir, than we know what

to do with. Mrs. Judge Peters thought there should be a handsome provision, and most kindly laid it in for us. It is very handsome, it is very complete. If I were to buy so much as a salt spoon, my wife would find it hard to forgive me."

"I see. How about personal ornaments? Ladies are, I think, as a rule, fond of personal ornaments, jewels, in point of fact." The minister thought tenderly of the one little garnet brooch which, in these thirty years, was all he had been able to give his Sue, of the rather battered little lockets which were his daughters' chief adornments. "You might, Mr. Tooth, you might purchase diamonds for your wife!"

"She doesn't care for jewelry!" said Mr. Tooth dejectedly. "She considers it sinful to adorn the tabernacle that will so soon be dust: her own expression, Mr. Chanter."

"Is there nothing that the good lady does want?" asked Mr. Chanter. He was used to reasonable women, and to unreasonable, to all kinds of women, in point of fact; but he had never heard of a woman who had no ungratified desires.

Mr. Tooth colored painfully, the red creeping up around his ears and the roots of his pale brown hair.

"There is only one thing," he said, "that my poor wife wants in this mortal world. That thing is twins."

"Twins!" repeated the minister in amazement.

"Twins, sir. She has mourned for years the lack of children, and in especial the lack of twins. She has felt that with twins her cup of happiness would be full, no matter if she had but a crust of bread to give them. She feels now that without twins the riches of

Solomon would be of no more value than so much sawdust. Her own expression again, Mr. Chanter."

"But, Lord bless my soul, man, why don't you adopt some twins?" cried the minister. "The world is full of twins, and orphaned twins at that. I knew some twins myself—to be sure they are grown up now and one of them is married; but nothing could be easier, my dear Mr. Tooth, than to find an eligible pair of twins and make your excellent wife happy."

The color deepened in Mr. Tooth's cheek. His light brown eyes seemed starting from their sockets. He blinked three or four times, nervously.

"I have often thought of so doing, Mr. Chanter!" he said. "As my pastor, I feel obliged to say to you that I have doubts as to whether it would be right for me, as a Christian and a professor of religion, to do so. The Lord has seen fit, sir, to withhold children from Emmeline and me. How do I know that this is not the cross appointed for us to bear? I have never spoken of this before to any one," he said simply, "but you inspire me with confidence, Mr. Chanter."

He looked anxiously at the minister, who coughed and turned aside for a moment.

"I think," he said, "that we are going to have a change in the weather. I feel sure of it. Probably rain before morning."

"Yes, sir!" said poor Mr. Tooth in a tone of dejected bewilderment.

"I see your point of view, Mr. Tooth," Mr. Chanter went on to say, examining carefully the various pens that lay on his desk as if it were a matter of great importance that he should choose the right one. "I see your point perfectly, but I cannot feel that it is

altogether well taken. I ask you to consider, sir, on the other side, the great number of children who are left orphaned, often under sorrowful circumstances. I would ask you, further, to consider, sir, the impossibility of our apprehending in our limited view the scope and sweep of the Eternal Mind. Our heavenly Father, sir, cares just as much for the orphan baby as for you and me. He is just as anxious that that baby should be cared for. I may say in reverence that I think it would be more pleasing to the divine benevolence to help a baby than to discipline the kind hearts of your wife and yourself. Do you take my point, Mr. Tooth?"

"I do, sir!" cried Mr. Tooth fervently. The tears stood in his mild eyes, but the distress and concern were melting from his face. "I see your point; the scales fall from my eyes, Mr. Chanter. I thank you, sir, I thank you with all my heart. I shall take steps. I shall take steps at once, sir, to see what may be done in this matter. As you say, there must be, in a place like New York, there must be twins left unhappily orphaned, to whom such a home as Emmeline and I could give them would be of incalculable benefit. Why, Mr. Chanter—" Again Mr. Tooth sprang up with a view to pacing the room, and again desisted from the futile attempt. "Now that you have opened my eyes, sir, I am amazed that I have not realized this before. I have lost a great deal of time. I blame myself. I blame myself, Mr. Chanter."

"No, no, don't blame yourself," said Mr. Chanter comfortably. "Don't blame yourself. Only be cautious, Friend Tooth. Be cautious. You want to be sure of getting just the right twins. The wrong ones

would be worse than none. Let us talk again before you take any definite steps. And now—" he glanced at the sermon—"is there anything more that I can do for you?"

Augustine Tooth was silent for a moment. There was another point on which he longed to consult the pastor; Emmeline's jealousy, the extraordinary attitude she had taken toward Miss Laughter, a talented and pleasing lady, whose society he found agreeable and inspiring. Would it be proper for him to consult the minister on this point? He debated the matter for a moment, then dismissed it. No, Emmeline was the choice of his youth. With no one but herself and with his sister could he discuss this delicate matter.

"I have already occupied far too much of your time, sir, I am aware," he said nervously. "There is just one more thing, one more thing that I trust you will allow me to do, sir."

He drew out a check-book and a gold pen.

"The parish, sir! you will allow me to draw a check for the parish of as large dimensions as you think could possibly prove useful. It would be an obligation, sir, which I feel I never could repay."

And this petition the pastor did not refuse.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCERNING TWINS

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune."

THE tide which began to rise in Mr. Chanter's study that May morning mounted rapidly: a few days later, it was swirling round the feet of Mr. Augustine Tooth.

. . . . . .

"So you won't build me a theater?" said Miss Lila Laughter.

Since what she called her turn-up with Timmy Ten (concerning which she spoke with perfect good humor; "He wouldn't have me!" she said with a wink to Mr. Very Jordano, dropping into the Irish brogue which was one of her minor accomplishments; "I was too ayger, and he put the comether on me. I'll thry you next, darlin'!") since that fateful interview, she had chosen the Temple of Pharmacy for what she called her morning lounge. Arrangements were still in progress with Tinkham and Corona, and there were even nibbles from larger and more distant fish. It seemed advisable for her to "sit tight" a while longer, and this she was by no means unwilling to do, finding the Mallow House much to her liking, and the host a daisy and a dandy, to use her own expression. What she called the Kweezeen also suited her, and she struck

up a friendship with Rosanna the cook, who became her slave, and let her toss up a salad or fry croquettes whenever she had a mind. Her relations with the Lady Boarders were more formal; she was easy and friendly with all, but made none of those advances toward intimacy which some of the ladies anticipated, and which Miss Pringle for one was prepared to "repel with a shudder, my dear." The fact was, as she confided to Mr. Mallow in a moment of expansion over a saucepan (he had been called in to taste the soup and approve the flavor), Miss Laughter could not "do with a parcel of women."

"They're not good enough, me dear!" said the lady. "When I want women, I take 'em one at a time. I could play all day with your Mrs. Peters, or Cousin Polly, or the minister's daughter, the youngest one, not the little tootsy-pootsy beautsy who can't exist in the same world with Lila. And I could *live* with Rosanna, bless her! but half a dozen of 'em, all chattering together—oh, Lordy! not for Lila!"

So she had fallen into the way of spending a morning half-hour in the pharmacy, to the mingled delight and distress of its proprietor. Here she was this morning, sitting on an onyx-topped gilt stool, leaning both dimpled elbows on the jasper counter, absorbing orange phosphate through a straw.

"So you won't build me a theater?" she said. "Now, Toothy, I'm right down disappointed in you, I am so. I'd set my heart on a dandy little theater, same style as this!" she glanced appreciatively round the glittering shop. "Only trouble with this, you haven't got a long mirror; say you put in a couple, what? Front and back view: you'd have all the women in the county

swarming—the men, too. I'd have the theater all mirrors, pretty much: like the Carpathian, only more so. Red velvet upholstery—no, blue! red's richer, but blue has more soul to it. And me as leading lady, doing the Reg'lar! Lydia Languish; Lady Teazle: dream of me life! I could do it, too! I've never had a chance. Honest, Toothy, I am disappointed!"

Mr. Tooth turned on her a deprecating and apologetic look.

"I'm real sorry!" he said. "I do regret not being able to oblige you, Miss Laughter, I do indeed. But—Cyrus is a small place, you see. It is not thought—it is not felt—in fact, Judge and Mrs. Peters advised very strongly against it, and so-——"

"Oh, if the Peterses are against me, I throw up the sponge!" said Lila. "I've learned enough for that. And after all," she added meditatively, "you couldn't fill anything bigger than a dog-kennel."

"But I am to build a town hall!" Mr. Tooth's face brightened. "I am to present Cyrus with a town hall of the—of the most up-to-date description, I hope. The selectmen have accepted the donation, and building will begin shortly; shortly!" He rubbed his hands happily. "Would you—would you care to see the plans, Miss Laughter? I have them here, and should be most happy——"

Lila waved a careless hand.

"Town halls are no use to Lila!" she said. "Well, Toothy, I must be tripping. That was a dandy phosphate! here's your nickel. Oh, yes!" as Mr. Tooth made a polite gesture of refusal: "yes, you will! Lila pays for her drinks. By by! Anything I can do for you in N'Yawk? I'm running on there to-morrow for

a day or two: business! What's the matter, man? Never heard of N'Yawk? I'm not surprised!"

For with all her good nature, Miss Laughter was a trifle nettled about the theater.

Mr. Tooth was blinking nervously. His long, thin hands moved agitatedly among his bottles.

"New York?" he stammered. "You are going to New York, Miss Laughter?"

"Yes. It's a town. Why shouldn't I go to it? Is there anything I can do there for you, I say? It's quite a place. I could get you some Amberantic. It's only forty dollars a bottle. That's nothing to you. How much do you want?"

Mr. Tooth shook his head.

"I thank you!" he stammered. "I was not thinking of perfumes, though some time I might possibly wish to possess—it was of another matter entirely that I was thinking. Miss Laughter, would it be possible that in the course of your business in New York, you might hear of—in short, of a pair—in short, eligible—of a pair of eligible twins?"

Miss Laughter stared, as well she might.

"Twins?" she repeated. "What do you mean by twins?"

"I—I—I mean—in short, I mean—in point of fact, twins!—er—young children, orphaned. My wife is desirous of adopting twins. I venture to suppose it possible that in your large acquaintance in New York, you might conceivably have met with the parents of orphan twins—I would say——"

"I wouldn't say anything till I got a little bit straightened out!" said Miss Laughter, now all her good-natured self again. "S'pose you say that again,

and say it slow! Mis' Toothy wants to adopt—twins?"

"It is the wish of her heart!" said the druggist earnestly. "It is—she says—the only thing in the world she does wish for. Until recently, I have thought—I have felt—" Mr. Tooth colored painfully and blinked his eyes—"that is to say, I have not felt to encourage her in this wish; but now I see things different; I should be real pleased myself, I'm sure!" he cried pathetically. "I love children, I do so; there isn't any one likes children better than what I do. What say?"

Since the acquisition of his fortune, Mr. Tooth had taken great pains with his speech, striving for the dignified and correct habit which he admired in some of his new neighbors, notably Squire Quint and Judge Peters. He had learned many long and sonorous words, and could often use them with—he flattered himself—ease and fluency: in moments of emotion, however, he was apt to revert unconsciously to the homelier speech of his Tupham days.

"What say?" he repeated, looking anxiously at Miss Laughter.

That lady had been listening attentively, her eyes very bright, her lips puckered to a whistle. She now rose from her seat, and brought her hand down on the counter with a resounding smack.

"I will say this is the limit!" she cried. "It really is. I didn't know things happened that way in real life. We make 'em so on the stage. Do I know a pair of twins? I don't know anything else! Let me tell you!"

She plunged eagerly into a history to which Mr. Tooth listened with equal eagerness. A friend of hers, Lottie Larkin, the prettiest little piece that ever stepped on the variety stage, had married a rascal, who was a disgrace to the shoes he stood in. He had treated that girl something shameful. The ready tears stood in Miss Laughter's eyes. She had these two babies, lovely babies, and then she pined away and died, and the best thing she could do. And when he found she was gone, if he didn't cut off and leave those two blessed lambs for anybody to care for that would! *He* didn't want 'em, he said. And off he goes to California, and a good riddance.

"And there are those two babies this minute of time, Mr. Tooth, at the Maternity Home in Blank Street. They are the beautifullest children I ever saw in my life, boy and girl, a picture that any one would turn to look at in the street."

"And—and—and healthy?" stammered Mr. Tooth. "This seems almost, may I say with reverence, miraculous?"

"Well, I guess it does!" Miss Laughter got up from her stool with alacrity. "If I don't bring you those babies within a week, Mr. Tooth, I give you leave to say I'm fit for nothing but the wrong end of a minstrel show. I'm off now to pack me bag. Wait till you see me back again and then you shall introduce me to your good lady. Shake!"

Their hands met in a fervent clasp of good will; and it was this moment that fate obliged Mrs. Tooth to select for coming in to "see what Gustine was up to," as she was apt to do several times in the course

of the week. At sight of Miss Laughter, she started back, her pointed nose vibrating, her eyes wide with angry amazement.

"Howdy?" cried Lila. "I guess you're Mis' Tooth, ain't you? Well, I'm Lila Laughter; I guess you've heard of me, though I didn't see you at the show the other night. There's where you missed it! Well, and here's where I get right on to your Pullman car." She laughted excitedly. "I'm your husband's best friend, see? Ask him if I ain't! No!" she clapped her hands suddenly together. "Don't you do it! And if she does—" turning to the bewildered Augustine—"don't you tell her a thing! not one single thing. Mind! If you do, the whole deal's off: I won't fetch 'em! Lila don't have her climax spoiled twice running, bet your life she don't! So long!"

Another moment, and she was gone, and Mrs. Tooth was fainting among the bottles and narrowly escaping death at the hands of her agitated husband, who came within an ace of giving her aconite instead of ammonia.

. . . . . .

I may as well wind up this little episode at once, before proceeding to other matters. Mrs. Tooth did actually take to her bed after this occurrence, and remained there for several days, lamenting her continued existence and refusing to listen either to her husband or to Mrs. Tenterden. Augustine, the soul of honor, considered himself bound to silence by Miss Laughter's adjurations. He could only say that good would come of it, my dear, good would come of it. He was faithful to her, as he had ever been. These and similar protestations had no effect whatever upon the dis-

tracted lady, who persisted in demanding instant dissolution.

I pass over the painful days that followed.

I should like to sing the glories of Miss Laughter's trip to "N'Yawk"; of her cataclysmic descent upon the Maternity Home, demanding "Lottie's twins," and proclaiming aloud that they were to be made into little angel millionaires that very second of time: of the tears of acquiescent renunciation shed by the Matron and every other woman in the Home when the situation was made clear to them; of Lila's triumphal progress through the Infant's Department of every important shop in the city, accompanied by obsequious floor managers who made way for her as for the passage of Royalty. Mr. Tooth had pressed into her hand at parting (he had stolen away to the railroad station, unbeknown to Emmeline) a check of preposterous dimensions, begging her to spare no expense.

"You bet!" said Lila briefly. "I'll do the thing in style, Toothy, don't you be afraid!"

"And—and—while you are making purchases, Miss Laughter, make one for yourself, I beg of you! something—er—handsome! as a favor to me!" Thus Mr. Tooth in the overflowing of his gratitude.

He was equally amazed and confounded at Miss Laughter's replying with a cool stare (so like Squire Quint that she might have been his daughter!) that he'd better not try to be fresh, for it wasn't his style.

"I won't take my railroad fare," said the lady, "'cause I was going anyway; there won't be any hotel charge, I shall stay at the Home; but anything that concerns the babies, cabs, and fees, and such, I'll take out of this: the rest I'll blow in on those blessed lambs.

There was a story in the Third Reader about a Golden Fleece; jiminy crickets, just you watch out!"

I should like, I say, to tell this pleasant and highly auriferous story in detail, but that may not be.

Less than a week later, Mrs. Tooth was sitting on her pink satin sofa in her "boodwore." She was huddled in a dingy crocheted shoulder shawl, a relic of happier and homelier days: her eyes were red with weeping; but the violence of her emotion had subsided; outcries and sobs had given place to sniffs of injured resignation. Truth to tell, there had been a "climax" the night before. After a week of hysterics and "moods," ranging from the lachrymose to the denunciatory, Sister Martha Tenterden had announced that she had "had enough."

"Emmeline," she said calmly, "it's time there was an end of this."

"An end of what?" asked Mrs. Tooth, who had been weeping openly into her tea-cup. "There'll be an end of *me* soon, well I know that. 'The wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest!' It's time I was, and out of the way: and a relief to all concerned, I make no doubt. Oh! oh!"

"Now, Emmeline!" said Mr. Tooth, gently, "I wouldn't, my dear! I wouldn't, if I was you!"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Tenterden.

Everybody stopped. Tim, emerging from the cloud of sorrowful bewilderment which enveloped him in these days, saw the gleam in his mother's eye, and reflected that they were "in for it now." Mr. Tooth looked puzzled, but anxious as ever to please; his wife raised her haggard eyes; the trim maid paused in the doorway.

"That'll do, Gladys!" Mrs. Tenterden nodded pleasantly. "We'll ring if we want anything. Now—" as the door closed on the reluctant Gladys—"Emmeline, yes, and you, too, Gustine, I say this has got to stop! I have had enough of it, and so has every one. Emmeline, you would do well to quit lamenting, and think of your mercies. You have nothing to lament about, that I know of. And, Gustine, for your part, do you stop meeching!"

"Meeching, Sister Martha?"

"Yes, meeching! babying Emmeline, when you ought by rights to take a stick to her. You've given her everything in the world that you had to give, and she throws it in your face. If I was in your place—" Mrs. Tenterden shook the crumbs from her lap and folded her napkin methodically, speaking always calmly and cheerfully—"if I was in your place I should whip her; I should so. Being in my own place, all I say is that if this goes on, *I* go off. I have had sufficient, and I do not desire any more! You two make up, or Tim and I move to-morrow. Timothy, you might come and help me tie up those roses in the long bed!"

The result of this speech was what the astute lady had intended, a partial reconciliation between husband and wife. "Oh, Emmeline!" and "Oh, Gustine!" they cried simultaneously, as the door closed on Tim and his mother; and in a few minutes they were wondering together how Martha *could* speak in such a way.

Next day the atmosphere was manifestly clearer. The breakfast table was, if not cheerful, at least, as Tim put it to himself, out of danger of a freshet. Mr. Tooth departed quite briskly, instead of drooping out

of the door with hanging head and hunted aspect. Mrs. Tooth tried for a while to maintain an attitude of dignified coldness toward her sister-in-law, but that lady appearing serenely unconscious of her efforts, she desisted, and finally assented meekly to the suggestion that they should go up to the boudoir and read the news. Here, therefore, they both were: Mrs. Tooth on the sofa, as above described, Mrs. Tenterden reading aloud such items as seemed likely to cheer and interest the forlorn lady.

The sound of wheels was heard outside.

"Gustine's got home," said Mrs. Tenterden. "Why, he's early."

A door banged: a clicking, rustling, jingling, was heard on the stairs, and presently a clear, high-pitched voice, calling:

"Where's Mamma Tooth? We're looking for Mamma Tooth! We've got to see her!"

Mrs. Tooth staggered up from her sofa, Mrs. Tenterden hastening to support her. In the doorway, beaming and breathless, stood Miss Lila Laughter, carrying in her arms a pink bundle. Behind appeared a sweet-faced woman in nurse's costume, carrying a blue bundle.

"Mamma Tooth!" cried Lila. "Here's your twins! And if ever you saw two sweeter children in your life, my name isn't Lila Laughter! Here! sit down! make a lap, can't you?"

She pushed Mrs. Tooth back on to the sofa, and plumped the pink bundle down on her lap; she took the blue bundle from the nurse and sat down beside her.

"Look at 'em!" she cried rapturously. "Did you

ever? That's the boy that you've got: this is the girl! Get on to her dimples, will you? Nine months old, and each got two teeth: my! my! Mamma Tooth, you are a lucky woman! Now what are you crying for, girlie? There! there! poor thing! I know just how you feel!"

I will not try to describe the scene that followed. I will only say that half an hour later Miss Laughter came running down the stairs, wiping her eyes. She jumped into the wagon, where Mr. Tooth was sitting, nervously grasping the reins and holding in his black horses.

"It's all right!" she said. "It's all right. I'm to be godmother. Take me home quick, or I shall bawl right in the street!"

In such manner did the Tooth twins enter upon the Cyrus scene. Beautiful and delightful babies they were, and beautiful and delightful children they now are; and there is no happier woman in Cyrus village than Emmeline Tooth.

Almost everybody in Cyrus rejoiced most heartily with the good woman; but there were those who thought her action in receiving the orphan babies an unseemly flying in the face of Providence.

"Instead of accepting her lot," said Mrs. Sharpe, "and 'singing ye barren' and the like of that, as laid down plain in Scripture, here is Emmeline Tooth *prancing* up and down Cyrus Street, with a double baby carriage! She and Augustine Tooth may call themselves Christians, and repair the church all they have a mind to, but *I* hope I know blasphemy when I see it, however bejeweled and bedizened!"

CHAPTER XIX

"LOVE THAT HATH US IN THE NET"

WE left Timothy Tenterden standing, sad and solitary, in the moonlight outside the Chanters' gate. His first move—a swift impulse born of the sight of that lovely profile in the moonlight—had failed. He had sent his heart out to her in the wild prairie chant of love and longing; she had heard, but there was no response; she had shut the window.

When Tim said to himself that it was over, he meant simply that this particular move was over. He had no idea of abandoning his set purpose. It having become evident that Lina was the one being destined for him through the ages, it was not one failure, or two, that could permanently discourage him. He walked home with his chin held high and his heart full of hopeful resolution for the morrow.

Alas! the morrow brought fresh disappointment. When he called at the parsonage in the late afternoon, bringing a little nosegay of the sweetest flowers the Gaylord garden could yield, he was met by Mrs. Chanter with the announcement that Lina had gone away on a long-promised visit to a friend in the Middle West. The minister's wife, seeing the dumb misery in the boy's eyes, made him come in, and gave him tea and scones, and comforted him as well as she could.

She asked him about the business, and about the

library. All her children, she said, found such comfort in the library. The girls had greatly enjoyed the little tea parties and the readings; as for Aristides, he looked forward to Thursday evening as the brightest in the week. What was it he was reading with the boys now?

"Lorna Doone!" said Tim dejectedly. "You know it, Mrs. Chanter? It's a beautiful story!" And he fell to thinking, not for the first time, how like Lina was to Lorna in her dark beauty, and how much better success he might have, if he were only big like Jan Ridd. Tim was big enough in all conscience, six feet in his stockings, and broad in proportion, with a lithe, well-knit figure, full of grace and strength; but what was six feet beside the Somerset hero?

He roused himself to say that he was glad Stides liked the club evenings. 'Twas first rate, having the fellows come. They were corking fellows. It was great to see Rodney the other night. Gee! how he wished he, Tim, could have gone to college! Wonderful, all these things Rodney was learning!

"But you are learning just as fast as he is;" Mrs. Chanter smiled. "He told me of the books he had brought you, and how wonderfully quick you were in following the chemistry course. And Latin; what made you think of taking up Latin, Tim? I was interested, and very much pleased, but I wondered a little."

Tim blushed. "Miss—Miss Lina," he said, "thought it helped one so to understand English, and it does, it helps no end. I like it, too, and Mr. Chanter has been so good—you've all been so good!" he cried. "I couldn't ever have got the start I have here without

you. It's good of you to let me come this way," he said, looking vaguely round, "and take up your time. Miss Lina going to be away long?"

Mrs. Chanter was not sure. Lina had seemed a little run down, she thought: a visit to her friend Mary always did her good. They missed her sadly. Tim must come in as often as he could. Perhaps he could come in to-morrow night. It was Zephine's birthday, and they were going to have strawberries.

Tim went away a little comforted, and more resolved than ever. Even if Lina had not been the one woman of this or any world, these were the nicest, dearest people he had ever seen. Come and see them? You bet he would, as often as he could in any decency!

So it must be confessed that for the next two weeks, he rather haunted the parsonage. He wanted a word of advice from Mr. Chanter; he had found a wild flower that he knew Miss Zephine could name for him; he wanted Stides to come for a walk; and it was very pleasant to all the good people, and everybody, except Stides, saw clearly through the crystal of his dissimulation, and things went, on the whole, better than might have been expected for a lovelorn youth deprived of the sight of his divinity.

And Lina? Why, Lina was with me, of course; so much the reader must have guessed. It was a very pale and depressed little Lina that I met on the station platform. She was perfectly well, she said, perfectly! Oh, no, nothing the matter at all; she had been a little tired, that was all, and mother was just thinking that a change would do her good, when my letter came. She was very glad to come, of course she was. It would be so delightful; and at thought of the delight,

her little face looked so woebegone that I could hardly keep my countenance.

We did what we could. There were several little festivities, including a tea party, a pleasant concert, walks and drives and so on. Lina revived a little. A shade of color even crept into her pale cheeks, but the shy joyousness, the quiet mirth that was so ready to break into pearls and dimples, seemed to be gone. She was not inclined to confidences, and I could only guess, by the aid of Zephine's occasional letters, something of the root of the matter.

She did confide to me during a long walk that she thought more and more strongly of becoming a deaconess. She thought, lifting candid eyes to mine, she could do the work. Not only had she visited so much with father, but for the last year she had been driving round with Dr. Pettijohn on his visits; this, after taking the nursing course at the Tinkham Hospital. She loved nursing. Sick people were always so dear: it was such a pleasure to do little things for them. She thought a deaconess' life was beautiful, didn't I?

"What does your father think of this, Lina?" I asked.

Lina looked down and colored. She confessed she hadn't spoken to father yet about it. He never liked to have any of them go away. She was afraid he might not like it at first, but of course, when she told him that she felt it her duty, dear father would be the first to encourage her. He always stood for duty, dear father did.

By and by there was a party, and Lina went in a white frock and looked, if not like a damask rose, at least like a very lovely blush one, so lovely that two

of our very best beaux fell headlong in love with her and did not get over it for several weeks after her departure. She smiled on them very sweetly and told them she was going to be a deaconess and asked them if they did not think it a beautiful profession, which they did not at all.

Encouraged by the success of the party, we planned various other little festivities, and looked forward to several weeks of the highly agreeable process of toning up the dear little friend whom we all loved, when suddenly a thunderbolt descended, in the uncompromising way that thunderbolts have. A letter from Zephine, after saying that all were well at home, mentioned casually that there was sickness in town, quite serious sickness. Poor Mr. Mallow and Rosanna were both ill. They had caught something, it was feared, from a tramp whom they had sheltered. The doctor did not know just what the sickness was. She, Zephine, was glad that Lina was there with Mary, because she knew just how she would behave if she were at home.

The consequence of which was that Lina packed her trunk in spite of all our protestations and entreaties, and took the next train for Cyrus, sending a telegram to announce her arrival.

As the miles sped past, Lina read and re-read Zephine's letter, one of those long, intimate outpourings that were the delight of both sisters and sisters' friends. She lingered specially over certain passages; one in which Zeph said that, my dear, we had found out all about Tim Tenterden's affair with Miss Laughter.

"It is really the simplest thing in the world, and the most absurd. Mrs. Tenterden told us all about it.

She came to supper last night; she is such a dear woman, just what I have always supposed a Middle Western woman of the right sort to be; strong and sensible and kind and, oh, so keen! Well, all about it was that Miss Laughter *dropped her wig* from an upper berth in a sleeping car, and Tim picked it up just as the porter was going to step on it, and gave it back to her, and she was so glad to have it back, because it had cost her a hundred dollars and was the first golden wig she had ever had, that she couldn't get over it. She thanked him all to pieces the next morning, Mrs. Tenterden said, told him how grateful she was and how she hoped she could do something for him some time, and I don't know what all, and then when she met him here, she thought that here was her chance, and she would 'do for him' in every way she could. She does seem to be the most good-natured woman imaginable. Think of her going on to New York and bringing those twins back for poor Mrs. Tooth! Why, she is perfectly transfigured—I mean Mrs. Tooth—you never saw anybody in such a state of rapture. Why, my dear, you can see the glow for half a mile round the house. I thought it was on fire the first night. Oh, dear! I promised Pa I wouldn't exaggerate. Anyway, *Rapture Reigns* at the Toothery—and I told Pa I wouldn't say that, either! Anyhow I wish they'd change their name, or any rate that they'd change the babies' names and call them Dent or something of that sort. The girl is to be called Lila, and the boy Timothy, after Angel Pa, and he doesn't know whether to be more pleased or provoked. Well, but the tragic part of it is that Tim has been frightfully annoyed at all this—I mean at her

hanging round the shop and taking things into her own hands and all that, really *frightfully* annoyed, Mrs. Tenterden says. He sees her good points, and all that, but he doesn't like that style, and he has been *almost distracted.* Now they have had some kind of an explanation—I don't know what—and I haven't seen her in the shop once since you went away. She is in at the pharmacy a good deal, and Mrs. Tooth met her there, and there was a terrible time, but now all is gas and gaiters, as Mr. Mantalini says—oh, no! it was the old gentleman in gray smallclothes—anyhow, it is in 'Nicholas Nickleby,' I know that! And everybody in Cyrus is perfectly enraptured, except the Sharpes and Mrs. Wibird, and you couldn't expect *them* to be.

"Tim has been in here a good deal. He seems low spirited, and we've done our best to cheer him up. I have taught him 'My True Love Hath My Heart,' he taking my part and I yours. He asked me to. He heard us sing it together and likes it better than anything he ever heard, he says."

Lina folded the letter with trembling fingers.

Oh, wicked, wicked girl! Oh, black and unnatural heart, to feel a pang of jealousy against her own darling sister! How could Pa and Ma's child have such wicked thoughts? Oh, she *must* go into deaconess work! There was nothing else for her if she was going to be as wicked as this. He liked the song best? so did she: Sir Philip Sidney's exquisite love song, which has floated down through the centuries, like a rose petal, for the delight of all true lovers. She saw the two singing together, Zephine's bright head beside his dark one. Oh, dear Lord, help her! Oh, dear Lord, put such thoughts out of her mind and help her

to give her life to others and forget her own wicked heart!

. . . . . .

The journey was over at last. Lina looked eagerly up and down the station platform, but no gray-haloed rosy father, no gay, twinkling little sister, no friendly, shambling brother greeted her eyes. As a matter of fact, her telegram was to arrive an hour after herself; but that she could not know. She hurried up the hill, noting as she went that the locust trees were in blossom, and the columbines gone, and the ferns fully out. Oh, lovely roadside! Oh, dear home ferns and trees and flowers! Oh, everything good and lovely and bright, except herself!

Her way to the parsonage took her past the Mallow House. It was evening in its early flush of spring loveliness. As she drew near the hotel, she saw a figure standing by the front gate looking out across the Common, and recognized it with a shock that sent the blood back to her heart. It was himself. It was her fairy prince. Say rather her St. George, as in the very most secret depth of her little foolish heart, she had come to call him. St. George was in shirt sleeves and overalls; but that did not matter. He leaned on a broom, looking out. His face was pale and set. Oh, how sad he looked, how stern, how beautiful! *Oh!* and she had thought such things about him. She had imagined him pleased with that poor foolish kind woman; she had gone away, and now Zephine—but all the more she must be very friendly, very friendly indeed. She must show him how glad she was to see him, how glad she was of any happiness that could have come to him.

So it was with her little hand held out, and with her flowerlike face raised with a radiance that illuminated the whole twilight, that, approaching the gate, she said:

"Good evening, Mr. Tenterden! I'm so glad to see you!"

That was all. Why at this greeting, should Timothy Tenterden start as if he had been shot? He flung out his hands with a wild gesture of repulsion.

"Don't speak to me!" he cried. "Don't come near me!" and turned and ran into the house; and as Lina, in an anguish of terror and dismay, looked after him, she saw gleaming on the doorpost of the Mallow House a red sign.

CHAPTER XX

"FROM PLAGUE, PESTILENCE AND FAMINE"

IT was about ten days before this, on a wild stormy night, that the tramp came to the Mallow House, asking a night's lodging. Billy, who opened the door to him, said, "Nope." (Billy's vocabulary was mostly limited to "yep" and "nope"; I don't think I ever heard him say more than three consecutive words, though Tim says he has talked to him by the hour about the possibilities of a future life.) Billy, I repeat, said, "Nope," and would have sent the wanderer on his way; but Rosanna demurred. Rosanna, dear soul, saw in every tramp with any semblance of youth in him, a possibility of resemblance to her brother Jake, who had gone to the bad some years before and never come back.

"I always think," she said, "supposing it was Jake! Do let him stay, Mr. Mallow! He can sleep right here in the kitchen on my lounge."

Mr. Mallow let him stay, of course. He opined he wouldn't turn a houn' dog out in such a storm as this was. This wasn't none of your little water squaddles; this was a downright storm, and darker than the plagues of Egypt. Let him stay right there and give him a mite of supper.

So the wanderer, fortified, not by a mite, but by as much supper as he could take—it wasn't so very much, after all, for the poor creature was already sickening to his death—spent the night on the sofa, covered with

Rosanna's shawl. When Rosanna came down in the morning, he was already gone, led by the half-blind, staggering instinct of the sick creature seeking a place to die alone. He did not go far; they found him behind a hedge a day or two later. The hedge was in Tupham township. Tupham buried him decently. Cyrus thought no more about it, and the ten days passed as other days passed. Rosanna sickened on the tenth day, Mr. Mallow the day after.

Tim Tenterden was spending the evening of this latter day with Billy. They played chess together once a week. It was the Event of Billy's week. He adored Tim, silently as he did everything else, but wholeheartedly.

"What did you do that for, Billy?" said Tim. He looked up, for the move had been an inexplicable one.

Billy passed his hand over his eyes.

"Can't see straight!" he said. "Things go round."

He staggered to his feet and pitched headlong over the chess table in a faint.

Tim got him to bed, looked in on Mr. Mallow to tell him of the occurrence and found him stretched on his sofa, feverish and miserable. After one look, he went quietly to the telephone, and called up first Dr. Pettijohn, asking him to come as soon as might be, then his mother, telling her that he should stay the night and as much longer as was necessary.

"What's the matter?" asked Mother Tenterden. "Have they got this cold?"

"I don't know what they've got!" said Tim. "They both look bad, and I hear the cook's sick too. I shall have to stand by, mother, if there's anything really wrong."

"Of course!" said Mother Tenterden. "Let me know in the morning and I'll send some things down."

Dr. Pettijohn came and looked grave; came again in the morning and looked graver still; asked searching questions. What transient visitors had been at the Mallow House lately? Hearing of the sick tramp, he whistled low. His visits carried him through the Tupham neighborhood, and he knew of the man's death, and what he died of. Forbidding Mr. Mallow and Billy to get up, which indeed they could hardly have done if they had wished, he beckoned Tim into the empty office.

"Get the people away!" he said. "That man came from Blankville." He named a large city where a virulent epidemic was raging. "Tell 'em it's measles, chickenpox, anything you like, but get 'em away. I'll find a nurse if I can. You'll stand by?"

"Of course!" said Tim.

"Good boy!" said Dr. Pettijohn. "Been vaccinated? Last winter? Good enough! I'll be in again in the afternoon." He nodded and was gone.

It was easy enough to get the boarders away. At the first hint of anything contagious—Tim said it might be measles, it was certainly some kind of skin trouble—they scattered like a flock of pigeons from a stone. There was hasty telephoning, hastier packing and flitting. Mrs. Scatter and Miss Pringle fled to Judge Peters's, where Mrs. Peters received them with outward serenity. The Misses Caddie were only forestalling by a few days their customary return to their home and their "Dishes." Mr. Bagley, about to start on a business trip (he "traveled in oil"), decided to take Anna Maria with him, "buck her up and give her

a change, and they didn't want any measles in theirs." Fled, too, the smart maids, one and all, this one with tears, that one with apologies and protestations of devotion. They would come back just as soon as it was safe, upon their solemn honors they would, but if it was anything catching, Mr. Mallow knew——

Mr. Mallow, already racked with pain and burning with fever, could only nod and wave dismissal.

"All right, gals!" he said. "All right. No circumnavigation! I understand. Only git, that's good gals!"

Remained only Miss Lila Laughter, whom Tim thought there would be little difficulty in dislodging. To his amazement, Miss Laughter refused to stir.

"Nice I'd look," she said, "running away when they've been so good to me! Why, I love that old Rosanna. I feel like a mother to her. And Mr. Mallow's as good as they make 'em, and Billy, too. I tell you I like this house. I haven't felt so much at home since father and mother died as I do here. And where would I go? You don't see me hopping back to the Museum, do you? I guess not! They're splendid people and all that, but no more for Lila nor yet for them: not but what we're first-rate friends! No, Timmy Ten, I reckon I'll stay right here. I've had it, had it when I was a girl. See that mark under me left ear? Well, then! And I'm a good nurse, too; had five years of it, taking father and mother together. I ought to know something. You go make up a fire! You're a good feller, too."

When Dr. Pettijohn came into Rosanna's room a couple of hours later, he was confronted by a tall woman with pale, smooth cheeks and a short crop of

dark curls, dressed in a neat print dress and white apron—she and Rosanna were about the same figure—who came forward quietly to meet him.

"Who are you?" asked Dr. Pettijohn, staring, as well he might.

"I'm the nurse!" said Lila Laughter.

"Well, I'm glad to see you!" said the doctor. "I've hunted everywhere and haven't been able to get one. Where did they find you?"

"I found meself!" said Lila.

The doctor looked her over. "Any experience?"

"Five years. Home nursing," she explained, "but I always took to it, from when I was a kid."

"Well!" he gave directions, brief and businesslike. "So much for the treatment. Now for the diet. Tell the cook——"

"I'm the cook, too!" said Miss Laughter. "I'm all there is," she added, "except Timmy Tenterden. He's a good boy. We'll see 'em through, doctor."

It was a dreadful time. Poor Rosanna died on the sixth day. Mr. Chanter came, in spite of the horrified protests of many of his flock, read the funeral service over her, and accompanied the coffin to its resting place. A few others came, Judge and Mrs. Peters, Sarepta Darwin, who had been at school with Rosanna, Mrs. Chanter, and old Ivory Cheeseman. Lina, spite of her agonized entreaties, was not allowed to go to the funeral, or to the Mallow House. In vain she protested that she was a nurse in everything except the possession of a diploma. In vain she reminded her father. Mild Mr. Chanter remained as adamant, and almost sternly told his daughter not to talk nonsense, but to be devoutly grateful that she was not,

God be thanked, actually needed. This good, strong woman, he said, concerning whom—he took off his spectacles and wiped them—concerning whom they had all been deplorably mistaken, was abundantly able, with Tim's aid, and under heaven and Dr. Pettijohn, to carry the others through. And Lina went to her room and prayed in such an agony as only young and tender hearts can know.

For the most part, people obeyed Dr. Pettijohn's stern injunction to keep away from the Mallow House. It was different for him, he said with a twinkle. They need have no fear; Mrs. Pettijohn baked him for an hour in the oven after every visit. Literal-minded persons were disturbed at this statement: Dr. Pettijohn was highly valued by his patients. Miss Pearl Caddie presumed likely he wore asbestos clothing, "and a mask!" she added, as her sister remarked that that wouldn't keep his beard from frizzing up. Miss Ruby opined that more likely the good doctor had "spiritual protection." There was no smell of fire on his garments, she pointed out, no more than Shadrach, Meshach, and 'Bednego. To her way of thinking, these things was Arranged.

Mr. Chanter, having less facilities for "baking" than the physician, and mindful of his nervous parishioners, made his daily call at the back door, without the knowledge of his elder daughter. If Lina's mind had been less occupied with highly emotional matters, she might have wondered at her father's wearing his best suit every evening at this time. If she had gone out in the garden in the evening, instead of praying in her room, she might have seen his everyday suit on the clothes line, waving in the evening breeze. She

might also have been conscious of a tendency on her father's part to shut himself up in his study and avoid, so far as might be, the family circle: but she was not allowed to go to the Mallow House, and Tim was going to marry Zephine, and she was going to be a deaconess, and this was all that little Lina's mind had room for.

One visitor there was, however, who came without fear and without concealment. In broad daylight, attired as for a festival, with silk hat, kid gloves and stick all at highest point of perfection ("I wish to convey an impression!" he said to his sister; "bring me some lemon-colored gloves, Hippolyta, if you will be so good!") Squire Tertius Quint walked slowly the whole length of the Street and then up the hill to the Mallow House. Rapping (one rap!) at the knocker, Tim Tenterden appeared in some trepidation. On hearing that the Squire had come to call on his kinswoman——

"You'd better not come in, sir!" he said. "Awfully good of you, and she'll appreciate it no end, but it's awfully infectious, you know!"

Blandly waving him aside, the Squire entered and made his way to the sitting room.

"I have come," he repeated, "to call on my kinswoman. If you will be good enough to inform her—ah! here she is!"

Here indeed was Lila, whispering vehemently from the doorway that he was a naughty old darling ducky-daddles, and that he must toddle-waddle off this very minute, or she would never speak to him again.

At sight of her, Mr. Quint rose and made his graceful old-fashioned bow.

"Pray do not be concerned on my account!" he said austerely. "Be seated, I beg of you, kinswoman!" and as Lila, with a despairing shrug, obeyed his imperious gesture, and seated herself close by the door, as far from him as possible, he added more benignly, "I have reason to think myself immune from contagion, even if at my age such matters were of importance. The weather is seasonable, is it not? I trust that all is going as well as may be with your patients?"

Assured on this point, the old gentleman drew from his pocket two small objects, neatly wrapped and tied, one flat, one rounded in shape.

"Your Cousin Hippolyta," he said, "begged me to bring you this small token of—a—of affection. It is, in point of fact, a cookery book, containing a number of excellent receipts for nourishing the sick and convalescent. She recommends especially the receipt for Restorative Pork Jelly; I may add that I myself have found it beneficial. She also asked me to say—and it is a sentiment with which I heartily concur—heartily —that in her opinion, all compounds of eggs and milk are rendered more palatable by the addition of a little white wine. Yes! I am glad you agree with me."

"Cousin Polly is an angel, and you're another!" said Lila. "Put it on the table, will you, cousin? I'm not coming a step nearer you, nor yet Tim isn't. And I do wish you would go away, dear!" she added anxiously. "It's all very well to be an Angelic Daisy, but why *should* you expose yourself?"

Before replying, the Squire proceeded to untie the second parcel; drew from the wrapping and held out on his palm—a snuffbox! It was a beautiful little affair, of tortoise shell, delicately inlaid with gold.

"Gee!" said Tim.

"My!" said Lila. "Isn't that a plumb beaut?"

The Squire winced, but remained benign.

"This box," he said, "was once of great service to me. I was—a—in point of fact, in prison, under highly unsanitary conditions. Disease was largely prevalent, much of it contagious. I had been so fortunate as to secure—in Naples—this box (formerly belonging to Queen Joanna, an infamous person, but possessed of taste) and with it a small quantity of snuff, of a very superior macouba. While in confinement, I used the snuff in moderate quantities, and remained apparently immune to the various forms of sickness which raged among my fellow prisoners. How much of this immunity was due to the snuff, how much to a robust constitution and good blood—the Quints have good blood—I cannot undertake to say; but I thought it not amiss to bring you this box, and a small supply of the same variety of macouba—" He produced a third parcel from his pocket—"trusting that you and—and your companion in devotion—may find it beneficial."

They did not laugh, when the old gentleman had made his bow and departed; they cried, instead. They were very tired, and Rosanna had died only the day before.

They might have laughed as well as cried, had they witnessed a little episode in the Squire's homeward walk. As he left the gate of the Mallow House, he was aware of a figure slinking along the opposite side of the street, under the hedge which bordered the Common. The shambling walk, the furtive glance, the shabby genteel dress, as of a dandy gone to seed, all

were familiar enough to any dweller in Cyrus. Mr. Quint stopped short.

"Wilson," he said, "be good enough to step over! I wish to speak to you."

"I—I can't stop now, sir!"

Wilson Wibird cast an apprehensive glance at the house, and rather hastened than slackened his pace.

"I'm on an errand—important errand, you see. Sorry, Squire!"

The Squire raised his stick and pointed it.

"Stop!" he said.

The other stopped, pressing against the hedge, as if to increase the distance between himself and danger.

"What do you want, Squire Quint?" he asked sullenly. "There! I've stopped. What is it?"

Very deliberately, the old Squire crossed the street and stood like a tree over the shrinking figure.

"Why are you not at your uncle's bedside?" he demanded. "Why are you not helping at the House, Wilson?"

Wilson's reply was as near a snarl as he dared to make it: he stood in mortal terror of the Squire.

"I'm not well!" he said.

"You are as well as your habits admit of your being!" The Squire spoke sternly. "Mr. Mallow is not only your uncle, but your employer. He has pulled you out of the ditch as many times as you have fallen into it; no mean number, as I am well aware. I ask again why are you not giving such assistance as is in your power?"

Wilson Wibird wriggled, and cast a baleful glance upward at his tormentor.

"Mother is sick, too!" he said. "My first duty is

to her, isn't it? And—" A hint of bluster crept into his voice—"I value my own life, Mr. Quint. I don't see what call I have to throw it away. I don't know why it isn't worth just as much as that young fellow's you all make so much of."

He jerked his head toward the House. Squire Quint towered over him, a very tall tree indeed.

"Your life, Wilson," he said, speaking slowly and distinctly, "is not worth a brass boddle. Not—a—brass—boddle!" he repeated. "I have a very pretty part of a mind to thrash you, sir, for the cur you are. Were it not for possible injury to my stick, which is valuable—" He glanced complacently at the beautiful "clouded Malacca" with its carved gold top—"I should do so. As it is, be good enough to get out!"

The degenerate flared up in momentary rage.

"Damn you!" he said, clenching his fists, and glaring up into the face above him. "If you weren't an old man——"

"How dare you call me an old man?" thundered the Squire. "Be off, dog!"

His lemon-gloved finger touched a spring; a long, slender blade flashed out from the cane. Wilson Wibird fled as if for his life.

Tertius Quint looked after him grimly.

"His ancestor hanged mine!" said the old soldier, as the sword slipped back into its hiding-place. "Thrashing is the thing for Wilson, however. It is a pity that I did not take the blackthorn stick."

Tim and Lila never cared to talk much about that time. There was no need for any one to know how bad it was, except themselves and Dr. Pettijohn. No one need know of the dreadful moment when Lila,

coming into Mr. Mallow's room, with a cup of gruel or what not, found the bed empty and the patient gone. He had been alone but a moment, had sprung up in his delirium and vanished, who knew whither? The Mallow House is large, full of ample rooms and long echoing corridors. A hasty call to Tim; a few moments of agonized search. It was she who saw him first, hanging from the beam at the top of the stairs; it was Tim who cut him down and carried him tenderly back to bed, fortunately not much the worse for the brief exposure. That was the worst night. Both lives seemed to hang by a thread. Tim, sitting by Billy's bedside, listening to his muttered ravings, had a strange feeling, as if he held one end of this thread and Lila the other, as if the fluttering lives were balancing on it as on a slack wire, fluttering, falling, recovering themselves—was he going to be ill, too? He wouldn't. He couldn't.

As a matter of fact, he wasn't. He was only worn out with watching and anxiety. Lila, coming in at midnight with her shaded candle and her cup of "nourishment," found nurse and patient both asleep. She laid her practiced hand on Billy's forehead, then on his pulse.

"And *that's* all right!" she murmured to herself. "*He's* past the worst of it."

It was the morning after this, when Lila, lightheaded after a night of watching, yet full of thankfulness and hope, leaned out of the window for a breath of fresh air. Her window gave upon the garden, and she was aware of a figure standing there, a light, slender figure, a flowerlike face uplifted.

"Who are you?" breathed a soft voice.

"I'm the nurse."

"Oh! but I thought they had no nurse except Miss Laughter."

"Well, ain't I Miss Laughter? Bless your heart, it's the little tootsy-pootsy beautsy! Don't you fret, honey, he's all right, right's a trivet! Mr. Mallow and Billy are both coming round. All hands better this morning. You go right home, little girl, and tell your pa you've been here, and tell him not to let you come over this way agin. You hear? Go right along!"

She shut the window firmly. "The idea!" she said.

Mr. Marshall Mallow was climbing up out of a pit. It was a horrible pit, miles deep and full of crumbling, choking black ashes that opened red eyes at him as he fought and scrambled his way up through them; full of Things, too—Things with eyes, and still worse Things without eyes, that moaned and gibbered and leaped at him, clutching at him with formless dabs of claw or flipper, Things that could not be real, and yet were horribly there, watching and clutching, as he climbed. He wanted to scream, but he had lost his voice down there somewhere, and one of the Things had got it and was mumbling it in toothless jaws. If he could only get out—if he could only get out——

Mr. Mallow opened his eyes. He *was* out. Too exhausted from the struggle to speak, or move, he lay motionless, not daring even to look about him. His eyes rested on something by the bedside that moved, with a swift, smooth motion, wholly unlike the horrible jerks and clutches which were still present before his mental vision. It was a hand, he realized presently, a woman's hand. There were two of them. They were sewing, deftly and skilfully. He saw the needle

flicker in and out, the thread pass smoothly from stitch to stitch. There was a worn silver thimble on the proper finger. The hands were hemming. This realization came to him not all at once, but in successive little shocks of comprehension. Another shock informed him that they were hemming a "wiper." Slowly, fearfully, dreading every moment to see an eyeless face bending near him, he lifted his eyes. It was a woman who was sewing, a strange woman, pleasant of face, with a smooth olive cheek and a close crop of dark hair. Her eyes were on her work and Mr. Mallow could note unobserved the firm curves of cheek and chin, the scar under the left ear, the fresh print dress and snowy apron. It was tiring to look up. His eyes dropped again to the swift capable hands, as they moved to and fro.

"She's a master hand at hemming!" thought Marshall Mallow.

Presently the eyes were raised and met his with a look of joyful surprise.

"Why, look at you!" said a low, cordial voice. "If you ain't wide awake! The idea! Lie still, like a good boy!"

Mr. Mallow shivered slightly. His voice was down there. He could not get it yet, but he found he could move his lips and make a little whispering noise, hardly more than the rustling of the calico gown, as its wearer bent over him.

"Who be you?"

"I'm the nurse!" said the cordial voice. "I am going to get you some nourishment in a minute."

A quiet hand was on his pulse. The mate to it was smoothing his hair back with light, firm touch.

"Who give you them wipers?"

The whisper was a little stronger now. It seemed almost as if he had caught a flutter, a trailing wisp of the lost voice.

"Why, I found 'em in a basket, and I needed some, so I'm hemming 'em. Don't you be afraid. There's plenty more for you to do. Now lie still."

She was gone, and Mr. Mallow wept a little, because it was so lonely, and he rather thought the mouth of the pit was just under the bed and that it had not closed after him; but here she was back again with a cup of something cool and soothing. A glass tube was put into his mouth and he was bidden to take a pull.

"It's on me!" said the cheerful voice. "For the good of the house! I'm doing the treating now."

She smiled at him with friendly brown eyes. Mr. Mallow sucked and felt a pleasing sensation stealing over him; not warmth, but freshness and well-being, and something that might be satisfaction if he could put a name to it. He looked steadfastly at the face that bent over him with motherly solicitude, then he said:

"I reckon it's shutting up!" and turning ever so slightly, he fell into a deep natural sleep.

"And *that's* all right!" said Lila Laughter. "And if ever a woman was thankful to the Lord, it's this one!"

They talked this over some days later, when Mr. Mallow was sitting up on three pillows in a pink wrapper, looking indeed the ghost of his former self, but a wholly sane and cheery ghost, washed and shaven and picking up health and strength hour by hour. He

told Miss Laughter all about the pit out of which he had climbed.

"Honest," he said, "it was just as real as what you be. It was realler, some ways, because the Things come at me." He closed his eyes and shivered.

"Well, don't think about 'em!" said Lila. "Don't talk about 'em! Put 'em away! That was fever, don't you see? There never were any such things. There was nothing but me and Tim and the doctor."

"You and Tim and the doctor?" repeated Marshall Mallow. "Where's Rosanny?"

Rosanna had gone away, Miss Laughter said. She had been sick and they had taken her away. She would tell him about it by and by.

"Sho! Poor Rosanny! I want to know! And where's Billy? I haven't seen him. Is he tending out good? Who's taking care of the Boarders?"

"Oh, we've got a woman," said Lila easily. "Billy's been sick, too. You wouldn't think it, would you?"

"Billy sick! Billy's never been sick in his life! But then, no more have I!" he added ruefully.

"Well, there it is, you see!" said Lila. "Has to be a first time for everything. I never was sick but once, and I didn't like it a mite. So—well, you see, Tim Tenterden was here when Billy took sick and he's been helping right along, and right smart, I tell you. He's a wonner, that boy!"

"I'd like to see him," said Mr. Mallow feebly. "I'd like to thank him. And Billy, too. I'd like to see Billy. He's all right, think? Just had a bad turn, same as me?"

"Just a bad turn, same as you," said Lila. "Tomorrow I think likely he'll be in to see you."

Then Tim came in, with his cheery smile; and then Dr. Pettijohn came in, broad and burly and comfortable, and told Mr. Mallow that he was a prize patient and he was going to send him to the county fair.

"Why, we'll get a gold medal for you," he said, "let alone a blue ribbon! Chicken for dinner? to be sure! If Miss—" he caught a warning flash from Lila's eyes—"If the nurse will speak to the cook," he added hastily," we'll get you up a chicken dinner this very day."

Mr. Mallow began to realize that the house was tarnation quiet.

"Where's the gals?" he asked. "Where's Hat and Et and Drusilly? How comes it they're lettin' you do all this work?"

Easily answered, easily put off, by so clever a woman as Lila Laughter. There was always a funny story to tell, a snatch of song to sing, a question to ask. She brought his big sewing basket, and he was told that he might hem a little, just five minutes, no longer. Let her see what was the best he could do in five minutes! That was a great treat and a great joke, and the astonishing part was that, though his fingers trembled and he could not see to thread the needle, he seemed to make as good speed as she did.

"Appears to me you're most as clumpsy as what I be!" he said.

"So I am!" she said. "But then think of all the experience you've had!"

It may have been after this conversation that Miss Laughter took to sewing on buttons, an occupation she had formerly despised. She went through Mr. Mallow's wardrobe carefully and methodically, but se-

cretly: taking away a garment or two at a time, when he was asleep; sewing the buttons on in workmanlike fashion, with what she called "a good neck." If Tim came in while she was thus employed, she would put the garment away, or throw her apron over it.

A day or two, and Billy was wheeled in, in the wheel chair that had served old Marm Mallow in her days of age, carrying her swiftly from room to room, for the inspection which never failed in accuracy, though she could not put foot to ground during the last ten years of her earthly pilgrimage. Billy was wheeled in, I say, shadowy but smiling, full of eagerness to snatch at returning life and strength, and to share his reminiscences of sickness with his friend and employer. He, it seemed, had had no pit to climb out of. On the contrary, he had been falling off mountains, dreadful glassy peaks, which shivered in his hands when he tried to climb them. There was something bad at the bottom, he knew that, but he never could make out what it was.

"But, honest, when I woke up and saw Tim there, I thought I was in heaven, I sure did!"

One miracle, if no more, had been accomplished. Billy was, for the time being, garrulous. He and Mr. Mallow babbled and prattled by the half hour together, full of desire to impart all that might be imparted of the horrors from which they had escaped; full, presently, as these began to pale and fade away, of curiosity. One day, Lila and Tim, coming in together, were summoned by their host and patient to tell him what all this meant, hey?

"There's something we don't understand here!" he said. "Me and Billy have been putting our heads to-

gether. We want to know where folks is. We're all right now. I ate a pound of beefsteak yesterday, or nigh onto it. We want to get at the bottom of this. Now you set down and tell us all about it!"

They did. They told them all about it. All danger of shock or relapse was now past. They were reminded of the sick vagrant, were told of what had befallen him, of Rosanna's death, of the whole sad course of things from which two had gone out into death and two come back into life; were told too, after a fashion, the story of the devotion of this man and woman who had so lately been strangers to them. Each gave all the praise to the other. From Lila's account you would have thought she had spent the weeks with a fan in her hand, sitting on the front porch. From Tim's you would have pictured him, cigar in mouth, sauntering about the garden. But neither Mr. Mallow nor Billy was a fool, and it hardly needed the doctor's coming in just then and telling them in a few brief but heart-felt words of what the two had done and how they had done it.

"By jings!" said Marshall Mallow. "By—*jings!* But one thing I hain't got clear yet. Who—*who be you,* lady?"

For the first time in all these weeks, Lila showed signs of discomposure. Her capable hands trembled ever so little over her knitting: her voice trembled too for a moment, till she got it under control.

"Now don't you try to get me rattled!" she laughed. "I'm wearing me hair different, and me complexion has gone off something fierce, but I'm Lila Laughter just the same, and don't you forget it!"

"By jings!" said Mr. Mallow again.

The word went forth. The cloud had lifted. The pestilence had departed. From house to house, all through the friendly village, the happy word passed like a fiery cross, not of war, but of peace and joy and good will.

Then Cyrus rose and prepared to minister. Cyrus busied itself in matters of mysterious preparation. Sarepta Darwin was "dripping jelly" in a special manner known only to herself. Mrs. Chanter, who had been baking bread for the stricken household all through the illness, now permitted herself and her daughters to ascend into the regions of ornamental cookery, and produced velvety sponge cakes, and moulds of various creams suspected of being arrow-root in subtle disguises. Mrs. Augustine Tooth actually tore herself from her twins for a whole half hour, while she oversaw the making of some super-delicate ice cream, which could be taken by a child of six months without injury. All these good things and many more were deposited at or near the gate of the Mallow House. They were mostly left at twilight. One by one, hurrying figures in cloak or shawl, would come along the lane that led to the back gate, bearing baskets or parcels. Their contents would be grouped beneath the butternut tree that grew by the gate. As dusk fell deeper, the hurrying figures being safely out of sight, Tim would go and bring in the contributions.

"Honestly," he said to Miss Laughter, "did you ever see such people? Look here, Lila!" For long before this time he and she were past all "Miss and Mr.-ing." "Six tumblers of jelly, two shapes, with all these lovely little cakes!"

"It's perfectly insulting!" said Lila Laughter. "You'd think I'd never had a mixing-spoon in me hand. I'd like to hug 'em all round."

And she wept with pleasure and weariness.

At long last came the happy day of release, the day when Dr. Pettijohn pronounced all fear of contagion over, all necessary steps taken. For some time now, in the soft June weather, all the windows had stood wide open day and night. Everything that needed burning had been burnt, everything else had been fumigated and washed and cleaned to the last point of perfection. Mr. Savory Bite, who had had smallpox in his youth, and Sarepta Darwin, who feared nothing in heaven or earth, never having "taken" anything takable in the course of her sixty years, had come forward to insist on being allowed to do the cleaning. Seeing them come and go, two of the older and more sensible of the maids came back, shyly at first, drawing their skirts about them as if the touch of chair or wall might be pollution, but soon dropping this and setting to work with ardor. The whole house shone from roof to cellar. Nobody had ever supposed there was any dirt in the Mallow House. There never had had been any; yet the scouring and whitewashing went on as if it were the grimiest hovel that ever was condemned.

Another week, and the Boarders began to throw out delicate hints about being ready and willing to come back, whenever it should be convenient; they were real homesick, they intimated; any day Mr. Mallow named should be their day.

Mr. Mallow, on hearing this, emitted something very like a snort.

"They was ready enough to go!" he said. "They speeded away like race hosses; hell for leather is the expression I should use if there wasn't a lady present!" he bowed to Lila. "Now they can wait till I'm ready!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE COURSE OF THINGS

"OH, isn't it dreadful?" moaned Mrs. Marcia Wibird. "Isn't it dreadful? My one and only brother, and here I lie!"

Mrs. Wibird was having a poor time with lumbago. It had come to make her a good solid visit, and she was fast in bed, with little power of locomotion. It was unfortunate that Mrs. Gwynne, the village nurse, was otherwise engaged at the time; was, in fact, trying to show Emmeline Tooth "how to rare up them children without killin' 'em." Lina Chanter was coming in twice a day, doing all that could be done to make the sufferer comfortable, but comfort always came hard to Mrs. Wibird. It was not congenial to her. She suffered, one almost thought, for the love of suffering.

"And here I lie!" she repeated. *"Oh!"* as a movement brought a sudden twinge. "You might wash my face now if you're a mind to, Lina. My one and only brother, and in the hands of that terrible woman! Oh, I submit to the yoke and the like of that, but I question whether it wouldn't be better to have him laying dead than in such hands as them. You put soap in my mouth, Lina Chanter, you did so!"

"Oh, I am sorry! I mean I am glad!"

The minister's daughter rose to her feet, very pink as to her cheeks, very bright as to her eyes. "There

ought to be soap in your mouth, Mrs. Wibird! Your mouth ought to be washed out with soap for saying such wicked words as those. Dear father would reprove you very severely, I am sure. Instead of being thankful that your brother has been saved—I fear your heart is in a wicked way, Mrs. Wibird."

Mrs. Wibird gaped speechless. It was as if a dove had flown suddenly in her face.

"Lina!" she gasped. "You speak that way to me!"

"Oh, yes!" said Lina, in her soft voice. "I have to, don't you see, Mrs. Wibird? I am probably going to be a deaconess, and besides I have to say what I think dear father would say, if he were here. Of course, I have not the authority, but I know what the human heart is, and I know how wrong and—and ungrateful it is for you to speak or think in this way."

"Well, of all things!" The unhappy patient gasped again and rolled her eyes about. "Why, Lina—" She made a feeble clutch at the authority of age over youth—"Why, you don't know what you're talking about, child! Why, this woman, who knows where she come from, or how her life has been spent? I say nothing about scarlet women, because I never do. It isn't my nature, and everybody knows it." A small tear trickled down Mrs. Wibird's thin nose. "Everybody knows I never say anything, but Sophia Sharpe says and maintains——"

"Oh, please, I don't wish to hear what Mrs. Sharpe says," the soft voice went on. "It is of no consequence whatever to me what Mrs. Sharpe says, and—and I think you must know, Mrs. Wibird, that she does not always speak the truth. Now we will have no more of this, if you please. If you will turn over, I will

rub your back, and you will try to go to sleep, and I hope your last thoughts will be of thankfulness."

"Don't turn me sudden! *Oh!*"

The turning accomplished, Mrs. Wibird subsided under the soothing touch of the soft hand (Lina, it was generally admitted had a gift for rubbing, and her velvety touch was like no one else's) into the mutterings of comfortable misery.

"And things going to rack and ruin all up and down the Street, Sophia says! Very Jordano cocked up in Bygood's, trying to run the business; the idea! And my poor Wilson, who ought by rights to be there, out of work! It is a sin and a shame. There! there's been no peace in Cyrus since those two interlopers come in. Where it will end, I don't know."

"Has—has Wilson offered to help at the Mallow House, Mrs. Wibird?"

If there were any malice in Lina's composition, it might have been supposed to pass into this question.

"Aie!" The patient flounced ever so little, and paid for the movement with an answering twinge. "I guess he hasn't! I guess Wilson knows what his life means to his mother! If there's no one else in this village appreciates him, she *does*. My son Wilson, I wish you to know, Lina Chanter, since you seem to be making so free with people's affairs, is a Blight."

"A blight?" repeated Lina. "I don't understand, Mrs. Wibird."

"A Blight. Ever since Kitty Ross treated him so shamefully, Wilson has been a Blight. I see him fade like a blossom on its stalk, and oh, what a sight it is for a mother's eyes! And as for resking his life by putting his head into the lion's den, you show little

heart, Lina, in putting such a question to his mother."

Mrs. Wibird wept afresh. Lina rubbed on quietly and soothingly. Presently a step was heard in the kitchen.

"There's Wilson!" she said. "Now he'll get you anything you want, and I will go. I'll be in again this afternoon."

Mrs. Wibird whimpered. She had thought that Lina might stay and get poor Wilson a bite of dinner. The poor boy was half starved, bangeing round on anything he could pick up. But Lina, after tucking in the bedclothes deftly, had already said good-by at the door and was now nodding a cheerful good day to Wilson, as she sped along.

She was already due at Bygood's. She had promised Mr. Jordano to hold the fort while he went to transact some necessary business connected with the *Centinel.* These had been strenuous days for Mr. Jordano. A telephone message from Tim Tenterden, two weeks before, had apprised him of the visitation at the Mallow House, and asked him if he and Stides Chanter could take care of the store while he was out.

"I am going to stand by!" he said briefly. "I have been vaccinated, so don't anybody worry. Awfully good of you, Mr. Jordano! See if I don't make it up to you some day."

So Mr. Jordano, with such help as Aristides could give out of school hours, had been keeping shop to the best of his ability. He had considerable ability, but perhaps it hardly lay in this direction. He certainly made a rather queer shop keeper. He could not seem to learn where things were, nor could he

often remember what his customer wanted. Being asked, for example, for shelf paper, a commodity much in use among Cyrus housekeepers, he might cast a vague glance along the shelf where it lay in symmetrical sheaves, and reply blandly that his young friend seemed to be out of shelf paper, entirely out-tout-tout.

"But we have some beautiful wall papers," he would hasten to add; "a veritable floral display-tay-tay! These rosebuds, Mrs. Peters, might weave a coronal for the brow of——"

"I don't want rosebuds, and I never wear coronals!" Mrs. Peters would reply. "And there is the shelf paper, Very, just opposite your nose."

Mr. Jordano found the receipt of custom an arduous, not to say nerve-racking, pursuit. Customers seldom had the right change, and arithmetic was not his strong point. His instinct, especially if the customer were a child proffering uneven sums of small coins, was to say, "Keep it and go-toe-toe! keep it and go!" But Mr. Jordano was the soul of conscientiousness, and this would have been highly unbusinesslike, he was aware.

"Now what do you make of twice thirty-seven and a half?" he would sometimes say half-jocularly, and then would work out the sum on a surreptitious scrap of paper behind the counter. If the customer's amount agreed with his own, he would say, "Quite so! quite so! molto correcto!" and tie up one's parcel with manifest relief.

In the late afternoon, when Stides or Zephine came in to "take on" in the front shop for a couple of hours, Mr. Jordano would retire into the back shop to write his editorials or correct his proof. Here his pleasure

more than made up for the anxieties of the front shop. Seated at Tim's neat little desk by the window, looking over the back yard which Tim had transformed into a pleasant bowery green space, Mr. Jordano felt peace and inspiration at once descend upon him. The accessories were so convenient, so inviting! The shining inkwell, the assortment of pens, so varied and all so excellent, the penholders ranging from the cork one, so light that one hardly felt it between the fingers, to the long quill which seemed to him the very essence of the literary; all this was in strong contrast to the dingy two-pair back where, amid dog's-eared calendars and between ink- and fly-spotted walls, the *Cyrus Centinel* came to its weekly being. The ink here flowed more easily. To be sure, Mr. Jordano dipped his pen into the mucilage (we used mucilage in those days) oftener than was desirable, but then there was so much fresh blotting paper, and such excellent pen wipers, both of "shammy" and the variety resembling a large tassel of black sewing silk. The mucilage was not at all good for the pen wipers; Tim found them in a sad way when he got back: but Mr. Jordano enjoyed them greatly. Then there was the whole little room, so pleasant, so full of restful charm; the shining glass cases with their books and specimens, all so regularly and carefully disposed; the pot of flowers on the window ledge, the tea tray on the low table by the fireplace with its shining cups and saucers. Mr. Jordano felt a kind of *bien aise* which, it seemed to him, he had never felt before. The young man, he thought, had almost a woman's gift for making things pleasant and homelike.

"Journalism," he said to Squire Quint, who had

dropped in one afternoon, "is an enthralling pursuit-toot-toot, but it is not, I apprehend, consonant with the Graces. Any item for the *Centinel* to-day, Squire Quint? The latest report from the—in point of fact, stricken household?"

"All doing well," said Squire Quint, "as well as possible."

He rested his ivory-headed cane against the wall and sat down with an air of weariness. "I have just called at the house—I would say at the gate," he added, as Mr. Jordano looked up in some alarm. "My—er—kinswoman informed me from the window that all was going—er—in point of fact, as well as could possibly be hoped."

Lila had said, "We're slipping along like a streak of buttered lightning!" but the Squire did not see his way clear to repeating this phrase, though it had lingered in his mind as a telling one.

"Miss Laughter keeps perfectly well herself, sir?" Mr. Jordano inquired anxiously.

"Perfectly well, perfectly well. I thought her—" The Squire paused and pondered a moment—"I thought her somewhat pale, sir. The color which—er—in short, which she formerly—displayed, has disappeared, but—er—this may be due to—" the Squire waved his hand—"to a variety of causes."

("Changed me complexion, you see!" Lila had said, out of the window. "Like me better this way, don't you, Cousin Tertius?" And the Squire had replied kindly, "Much better, kinswoman! much better! Your resemblance to the family is now—er—happily apparent." Whereupon Lila had thrown him a kiss and told him to go along.)

"Miss Laughter has developed," Mr. Jordano hinted, "a new talent, that of nurse. I understand Dr. Pettijohn to say that he considers her an admirable nurse. Cyrus is fortunate indeed, sir, in having gained such an acquisition as this highly talented member of your family."

A month ago, the Squire would have winced at this, would have raged inwardly, and gone home to tell Hippolyta that this sort of thing must—not—go—on. Now he bowed his handsome head in grave acquiescence and remarked that, though Eliza's bringing up had been one foreign to the family traditions, he and his sister, as they became better acquainted with her, recognized many family traits.

"My mother, sir," said the Squire, "was an admirable nurse. She cared for the sick of two generations."

As the Squire rose to go, a rustling and crackling of silk was heard in the front shop and a voice asking for the editor. Mrs. Augustine Tooth appeared, dressed in a silk gown of the newest fashion and of the precise shade of light tan then most in vogue. The good lady was a little out of breath.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Jordano?" she said. "I have brought you an item!"

"Ah! Pray be seated, Mrs. Tooth!" Mr. Jordano with a combination bow of welcome to the lady and of farewell to the hastily-departing gentleman, drew a chair forward and took out his notebook. "Yes, madam. Is this fact—er—social or domestic-tic-tic?"

"It's about the twins!" Mrs. Tooth beamed over her fashionable parasol. "I knew people would be interested to hear. They have each cut a new tooth!"

Mr. Jordano coughed and murmured, "Indeed-teed-teed!"

"Came both last night!" Mrs. Tooth was very impressive. "That's what seems so remarkable, because, you know little Timmy is larger and stronger than little Lila; but they both have such fine constitutions, you see, Mr. Jordano, and being in the perfection of health, every part of them accompanies all the others, if you understand."

Mr. Jordano did not understand at all. He coughed rather nervously, and asked how Mrs. Tooth would like the item worded.

"Why, that," said the lady, "I must leave to you. I am not literary, you know." She giggled. "But if you would just say something like that the two most beautiful babies in the State, perfect in every way, in form and feature and disposition, both cut a tooth together without an hour's trouble to themselves or anybody else—if you would just put that in literary form, you know, Mr. Jordano!"

Mr. Jordano passed his hand over his hair.

"I really, my dear Mrs. Tooth—" He quavered. "This seems a little out of the line of the *Centinel,* if I may say so. Do you think, perhaps, that to spread this—er—this joyful intelligence among your friends by word of mouth, as it were, might possibly be-tee-tee more, shall I say congruous?"

Mrs. Tooth stared.

"Why, I thought you were always on the lookout for items of interest!" she said. "I drove all the way up here in the heat just to tell you."

Mrs. Tooth began to look flurried, and her nose to vibrate. Mr. Jordano, on the other hand, became more

and more confused. He was stammering something about "molto agreeablo, molto agreeablo," when fortunately, at the precise psychological moment, Lina Chanter came in. In two minutes all was smooth again. A little paragraph had been composed, saying the right thing in the right way. Mrs. Tooth had been assured that the babies certainly were the most beautiful little creatures that ever were seen—the assurance made in good faith; they were indeed lovely children and were already beginning to be the pride of Cyrus—and sent on her way rejoicing; and Lina, her sweet face alight with happiness, turned toward the journalist with a happy smile.

"It is all over, Mr. Jordano!" she said. "They are really well. The cloud has lifted. I am going to make a cup of tea for you and one for myself, and we will drink—" her soft voice trembled and two bright little tears overflowed and ran down her damask cheeks—"we will drink to the two good angels of Cyrus!"

That was not one of the least happy of the little tea parties that the friendly back shop saw. Mr. Jordano was in the seventh heaven of gratification to have this lovely young creature, rosy-fingered Aurora, as he put it with a gallant little bow, pouring out his tea and dispensing the nectar into which the touch of her hands converted the domestic beverage, which, already fragrant, now became— Here, Mr. Jordano was hopelessly involved and waved his hands with complimentary distraction.

"Oh, Mr. Jordano," said Lina, "you do make such pretty speeches! I wonder where you learned them. You know almost everything, don't you? See, I brought some cookies for you. I think—" the sweet

eyes brimmed over again—"I thought I just wanted to come here and have a little festival with you, because—because you have been here, you know, taking care of it all for him—I mean for Mr. Tenterden, and we are all so grateful to you and so happy to know that he—that all of them are well, and that the dreadful, dreadful time is over, and——"

I don't quite know how Lina might have finished her sentence if nothing had happened. As a matter of fact, she never finished it, for she looked up and saw Tim Tenterden standing in the doorway.

If Mr. Jordano had not been there, things might have happened; but Mr. Jordano was there, and his overflowing warmth of cordiality and delight at seeing his young friend again seemed to fill the whole place. It was easy for Lina, after one glance at the combination of St. George and all other active and adventurous young saints, one shy yet fervent handclasp, to slip away. Tim would have detained her, but the words would not come. She did not see, or would not see his little gesture of entreaty. He could not know that her eyes were cast down to hide the thankful tears that brimmed them. She was flitting homeward like a little brown bird, to seek her room and kneel by her little bed and pour out thanks to heaven.

And here was Mr. Jordano, bowing all over the shop and crying:

"Ecstatico! Ecstatico! I bid you welcome, my young friend! Joyoso day-tay-tay! Very happy to see you, I am sure!"

Others came in. Word spread through the village that Tim Ten was out of bondage. Front shop and

back shop overflowed, as one after another hastened in with exclamations of greeting, of thankfulness, of appreciation. It was all very pleasant. They certainly were, as she said, the best people in the world. How nice of them to come in! How he wished they would go away!

"I say!" A happy inspiration came to him. "Mr. Jordano, you've done all this so well, you've been so perfectly splendid; don't you want to finish out the afternoon, sir? I haven't seen mother yet, you know. Why, you haven't finished your tea! I know you haven't. Here, let me give you another cup! Oh, here's Miss Zephine! Say, this is great! You'll give Mr. Jordano another cup, won't you? Sure! It's all been perfectly splendid! That is, as splendid as it could be! Miss Laughter has been a perfect wonder. There, I can't tell you what she has been! Yes, the Boarders are coming back to-morrow. Yes, the girls are back, and Drusilla is going to help in the kitchen till we get somebody. So good of you, Miss Zephine! Good-by! Good-by, everybody! I'll be on the job to-morrow morning for keeps!"

He hastened away. No possibility of overtaking her, of course. She was at home by this time, in that happy house that was so empty all those weeks of her absence. This was basely ungrateful of Timothy. How many meals had he eaten in that "empty" house! How many pipes had he smoked! How many songs had he sung!

To do him justice, Tim never thought of going even to the parsonage before he had seen his mother. As he hastened along the road to Gaylord's, he was conscious that the world was a very beautiful place.

It was early June. The road was always a pretty one, with its thickets of wild roses straggling along the stone walls, its sturdy oaks and graceful, bending elms. There were white birches, too, singularly like Her, he thought, as he sped along, so white, so slender, so full of perfect grace. The birds were singing as they never sang before. They were all saying, "Lina, Lina, Lina!" over and over again. It was very strange.

Entering the house, he found his mother very bright-eyed, with a deeper flush than usual on her round, wrinkled cheeks. She was expecting him. She had been looking for him all the afternoon.

"I couldn't get away!" said Tim. "I stopped just a minute at the store, and they were all so friendly! I got away as soon as I could."

"I am sure you did!" said Mrs. Tenterden. "Now let me look at you, boy! Seems to me you've stood it well enough."

She stood holding his hands, looking at him in her quiet way. Ecstatics were not at all in Mrs. Tenterden's line. They were not needed between the two. The quiet glance of mutual understanding and trust, the handclasp, the quiet kiss on brow or cheek, were all they needed. But he must tell his story.

"Don't go to the mantelpiece!" said Mother Tenterden. "There's a whole set of new creatures, and you would be sure to break some of them. Uncle Gustine mourns that poodle still, though he's had a whole menagerie since. Sit down here by me and tell me."

He told her everything from beginning to end, she nodding now and then, or drawing a quick breath as

he dwelt on the darker moments, which, however, he passed over as lightly as might be.

"It was a bad time, mother!" he summed up. "A bad time, but, honestly, I think I can say to you, it was a good job. Lila and I did the best we knew how, and she knew a lot and taught me. She's a fine woman. Mother, I want to take back everything I said about her. She can wear a dozen wigs, one on top of another, all colors of the rainbow, if she wants to!"

"I hope she won't want to!" said Mother Tenterden, soberly.

Timothy laughed gleefully.

"She's left off the one she had. I don't know what she's done with it. I haven't seen it since the first day. She wears her own short hair now, and she's a mighty good-looking woman."

And now, his mother said, they must go in and see Aunt Emmeline, and tell her all about it. "You must be prepared to find your Aunt Emmeline much changed," she said, with a demure twinkle. "Twins, you know, make a difference in a household."

"Gee! if I hadn't forgotten the twins!" cried Tim. "Lila told me about 'em, of course. Say, I suppose they're all creation, aren't they?"

His mother replied only by an eloquent glance and beckoned him to follow her.

The "boodwore" was now the nursery. Impossible for Mrs. Tooth to be at any distance from the twins, and this room was central and easy of access from any part of the house. The pink satin sofa was banished, and two white cribs of the newest and most correct pattern stood in its place. Their sheets were of finest linen, embroidered and trimmed with real

lace; their blankets were Californian, the lightest, downiest, fleeciest that ever came from the back of a prize sheep. Across the foot of each was a miniature eiderdown puff, covered in glossiest satin, one pink, one blue. In each crib lay a baby, plump, pink, blue-eyed, smiling, dressed in the finest and sheerest of slips, "every stitch hand-embroidered"; no machine should touch her babies' clothes, Mrs. Tooth declared. That lady herself was hovering between the two cribs. She was still dressed in the fashionable tan colored silk, but over it flowed a kimono apron of fine cambric, heavily embroidered. She was talking volubly to the capable-looking nurse who, trim and spotless in blue and white, stood with folded hands at the head of one of the cribs.

"Because I always say," she was saying, "that babies should have the best of everything. Their eyes should only rest on what is perfect, you see, Miss Swift. That's why I wouldn't keep those dolls. Their features were not good. Babies' eyes should be trained from the beginning to rest only on objects of beauty. That's why I couldn't keep Miss Thompson; her nose was so irregular in shape, you know. Your features being so regular is what drew me to you in the first place. I don't see but we get along full as well without her!" she added, with a toss of her head.

"What was it then, darling?" as the pink baby moved upon his pillow. "Did it want something, a precious tootle-pootles? What do you think he wants, Miss Swift? Does he want something to play with? See, give him that green pig from the mantelpiece! Thankful I am we have found *some* use for it at last! Who's this coming now? Dear me, they'll disturb

Babies, just when they're lying so quiet! Why, Tim, is it you? Why, I am glad to see you. Come right in. Hush! Step softly, please! Little Lila's drowsing off, but little Timmy's wide awake," she added joyfully. "Come right in and look at him. Tell me if you ever saw anything so beautiful in all your life, Tim Tenterden!"

"Awfully nice babies!" said Tim. "Awfully nice babies! Gee! they're corkers, aren't they, Aunt Emmeline? Why, how well you look too, and spruced up, my!"

"I have to dress for Babies!" Mrs. Tooth said. "The finest there is is not too good for them, nor good enough. I tell your uncle Gustine he can buy all the prabbles he wants now, crystal and jade and the like of that. None of them is good enough for Twinnies to play with. Hush! Timmy's drowsing off now. Let's we go down into the parlor and hear all about it!"

A parting gesture of caution, and she tiptoed out of the room. Tim followed marveling. He was to marvel still more when he found how utterly changed was the aspect of the house since the advent of the twins. Everything centred round them. Doors and windows were opened or shut, curtains were raised or lowered, steps and voices were regulated by their fancied needs and wishes. Instead of the timorous, lamenting soul he had left a month before, he found a gay, exultant little woman who found the days too short for her happiness, the ample fortune left by Mr. Wisdom Tooth inadequate to her desires.

"We must have the best!" she was constantly reiterating. "Cost should not be considered for an in-

stant. Get the best, Gustine! We've got the best children that ever the Lord blessed a house with, and what I say is, we must live up to them. I wish't you'd get you some new neckties, Gustine, a more delicate shade. I want Twinnies should look at you often and learn to love you, and I don't like that strong color for their eyes."

It was well for the twins that Miss Swift, the nurse, was a sensible person; well, too, that Mrs. Tenterden was there to back her up in every wise enforcement and prohibition; otherwise, who knows what might have become of the unfortunate twins? As it was, they throve as well as could be expected, and it was a happy and rejoicing household to which Tim had returned.

"But there isn't any room for me in it," he said privately to his mother, after a few days. "Honestly, mother, we'd better find a place of our own, don't you think so?"

His mother looked at him inscrutably and made no reply, save to ask him if he was going out again.

"Yes," said Tim. "I promised to go to supper at the parsonage. Is that all right, mother?"

"Quite right, son!" said Mrs. Tenterden.

CHAPTER XXII

BILLY SPEAKS

THE landlord, full of the joy of returning health, thought it an excellent opportunity of doing a little of what he called "snickeration." The parlors was all right, he said, but they was too condinged plain for his taste; Marm liked 'em that way, but 'twouldn't alloy her now, and she in glory. Snickerate 'em up, was what he said; tastify 'em, what say? Miss Laughter agreeing with enthusiasm, samples of every conceivable kind were sent for; samples of fabrics, of paper, of paint; the eventual result, I may say, being something between a theater and a fancy fair. They were like children with a new toy.

"Here's some more scramples!" Mr. Mallow would cry gleefully, opening his morning mail. "Here's loads of scramples! plush and velvet and bokade and I don't know what all! here!" and he dealt them out like cards, Lila, Tim and Billy stretching out eager hands. "Them is real fancy! them is the style, I tell you!"

One morning there was, beside the samples, a parcel and a letter for Lila. The former was elaborately tied with pink satin ribbon, and was inscribed "with best wishes of Mr. and Mrs. Augustine Tooth." Being opened, it revealed a bottle of unusual form, sealed and tied in its turn. Miss Laughter surveyed it with mingled awe and amusement.

"The old dears!" she cried. "The lambs! to think of their remembering—or his, at least!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. Mallow. "Looks like a fumery bottle!"

"It is! it's the most wonderful perfume in the world. Ambre Antique! I've always wondered what it was like."

She began, almost reverentially, to untie the final ribbon which bound the white kid covering on the glass stopper.

"Amberantic?" repeated Mr. Mallow. "Never heard of it! Don't believe it's up to that stew you gave us yesterday, Mrs.!" (the title by which he always addressed Miss Laughter). "I never was much on fumery: give me good victuals to smell and it's all I ask!"

Lila was sniffing delicately at the bottle, her eyes half-closed.

"De-licious!" she murmured. "I used to read the lists of high-price perfumery and wonder what 'twas like. I never got above frangi-pani myself: this is—well, different as can be. Set him back forty dollars, this bottle did!"

"What!" cried Mr. Mallow, scandalized. "You're joking, Mrs.!"

"Not a joke! cold facts, Mr.! forty dollars this bottle cost. Some sniff, what? It's wonderful—but yet," she added slowly,—"I don't seem to care what I should have thought I would. What gets me is their doing it. Say! your folks here do certainly beat any I ever came across."

Her laugh was not quite steady as she replaced the glass stopper carefully.

"The day I leave," she said, "you shall each have

a drop on your hanky, so you won't forget Lila before the next wash!"

Then seeing Mr. Mallow start and look up in dismay, she added hastily:

"Now I must read me letter. Look at the style, will you? Must be from the President, asking me to sing at the White House!"

The large square envelope with its portentous seal contained a few lines in a small, clear, beautiful hand. They began, "My dear kinswoman," and went on to inform Lila that when the period of her laudable ministrations was at an end, the home of her ancestors would be open to her for as long a period as might suit her convenience.

"My sister joins me in the hope that we may once more welcome you under our roof; and with sincere regard, I beg to remain, my dear kinswoman,

"Your ob't servant,

"TERTIUS QUINT."

Lila looked up from the perusal with eyes full of genuine wonder. Neither then nor later could she see anything unusual in what she had done.

"Wasn't anything else *to* do!" she said simply. "Some things are just plain have to. See?"

"Did you ever?" she cried now, her eyes shining. "Honestly Mr., *did* you ever? Why, that blessed old Monument—why, I set every tooth in his head on edge every time he looks at me! and here he is asking me to come and stay as long as I like. I call that pretty heavenly, don't you?"

"But you ain't goin'?" Mr. Mallow looked up in alarm. "Of course they'd want you, stands to reason they would; but you won't go, Mrs.?"

His look of bewildered appeal was comic enough, but Lila did not laugh.

"I won't go to-day!" she said. "You may bet those handsome slippers I won't! Here! we haven't picked out those parlor curtains!"

Mr. Mallow's brow cleared, and he plunged with renewed ardor into the consideration of the "scrampples." The green bokade with the apple-blows for him, he declared; made you feel like you was out in the orchard. Bell-flower blows them was, he'd bet a hat.

A keen observer might have noted that though the cloud disappeared under the influence of the "bokade," it returned from time to time through that day and the days that followed. His eyes followed Lila about with a troubled look; nor was it only looks; his steps followed hers about the house. He wanted her advice on every point of decoration and re-furnishing.

"I want it should be the way you like!" he said over and over again. "Your taste'll do for me, Mrs.!"

He was especially concerned about the room Lila herself occupied, the "balcove" chamber, as he called it, a pleasant corner room with a curtained alcove for bed and washing apparatus. The curtains down, it appeared a charming sitting room, two windows looking on the common, the third up the long elm-shaded vista of By Street (it had another name, but was never called by it) toward the sunset. This room, I repeat, was the object of the good landlord's special anxiety. It must be exactly as "Mrs." would like it: carpet—no, rugs! she liked rugs best, didn't she? Paper, hangings (Mr. Mallow called them "graperies"), and all.

"I want you should choose!" he kept saying. "I

want it should be the way you like, Mrs. So does Billy; don't you, Billy?"

"Yep!" said Billy.

The two of them were at her heels, like following, adoring dogs. They stood on the threshold of the room, looking in anxiously.

"You think this sprig is the tastiest?" said Mr. Mallow. "Then we'll have that for the window grapery. Order it, Billy!"

"But it's the most expensive!" Lila objected. "Look at the price!"

"Ding the price!" said Mr. Mallow. "We don't care about the price, do we, Billy?"

"Nope!" said Billy.

Lila making some further protest, the landlord declared he must go and bring in some letters; they hadn't had any for a dawg's age. Lila stared.

"What are you giving us, Mr.? We've had the afternoon mail, three circulars and five bills."

Mr. Mallow didn't mean them; he meant fresh letters, for supper.

"From the gardin!" he explained. "I do admire fresh letters with merrynase sauce. I'll make the sauce; it's sipid without a good sauce."

"Oh, lettuce!"

"That's what I say; letters. Some likes salary, and some likes cukes, but I always say, give me letters, I say, *with* a good sauce!"

What pleasant little suppers those were! After Tim left—he had to get back to the store as soon as might be, for Mr. Jordano, in the ardor of his good will, was handling the business much as a nest-making mouse handles the contents of a bureau drawer—

after Tim left, the three who were left drew yet closer together.

"The Three-oh," Mr. Mallow called them. "Me and Billy would make but a poor do-it," he proclaimed, "but the three-oh goes fine, don't it, Billy?"

"Yep!" said Billy.

The supper hour was the top strawberry of the dish, the landlord declared. Every evening "Mrs." produced some fresh proof of her really amazing gift of cookery. Now it was a dish of sweetbreads, an offering from a friendly butcher who had "killed himself," and didn't mean nobody should have the "bread" except Marsh Mallow.

"Most times," he bellowed from his wagon ("the woman" had made him promise not to go into the house, for fear of lingering contagion) "most times them farmers, they'll rob the bread right out of a veal before they send it in!"

Lila's way of cooking sweetbreads was something Mr. Mallow always spoke of with bated breath. 'Twas learned her by a sheaf to New York, he said, and there! the milennion might be good enough for it, but he didn't know anything else as was. Or somebody had sent in a basket of mushrooms, warm ivory above, pink-pearly below, the dew still on them.

"The darlings!" cried Lila. "Get on to these daisies, will you, Mr.? Seems a shame to cook 'em, what? Poor old Cousin Quint!" she added, as she began to peel the mushrooms delicately. "He ought to have these; he does love 'em. The first he knew of my being human was when I cooked mushrooms for him."

"He won't get one smitch!" cried Mr. Mallow glee-

fully. "Not one solitary smitch will he get! What'll you— Nothin' only just cream? Want I should hot it up for ye?"

The "snickerations" were completed. The Boarders were coming back: coming that very afternoon. The new cook had arrived, and promised to be a treasure; the capable maids were smiling and expectant; Billy had returned to the office and become, to outward view, the living automaton he had always been. It was a bright, sunny morning; Billy left the door open as he brought in the mail, and the scent of lilac and syringa came floating in warm and sweet from the garden.

"You!" said Billy, and he handed Lila a large blue envelope with an ornamental device in one corner. At sight of it, she started, and stood holding it a moment before she opened it.

Mr. Mallow was opening his bills with hardy cheerfulness.

"Ding the expense!" he had said. "I'm goin' to have things the way I want 'em!" and he did not flinch at the result. One bill seemed to give him positive pleasure; it was for the gay chintz "grapery" and paper of the "balcove chamber." He looked up with a smile, which froze into a look of horror. "Mrs." was weeping! An open letter was in her hand: the tears were rolling down her smooth brown cheeks, and she made no effort to wipe them away.

"Wha-what's the matter?" quavered the landlord. "Mrs.! You cryin'? What's happened? Somebody dead among your folks?"

Lila shook her head and tried to smile.

"Nobody dead!" she said, in a tone that tried to be

vivacious. "Just the other way, Mr.! Somebody's come to life: the Players; what do you know about that?"

She wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron and smiled, a most unconvincing smile, with the corners of her mouth drooping instead of turning up, and her lips trembling.

"Players? Who? What? What you talkin' about, Mrs.?"

Mr. Mallow rose with looks of dismay. His whole world was in upheaval. "Mrs." was crying!

"I'd like to know what you mean!" he said. "I'd like to understand. I never see you act like this."

"The People's Peerless Proscenium Players," said Lila. Her voice was quite steady now, and her smile fixed and resolute. "I've got a letter from the manager. He's pulled them out of the hole and is starting in again, with a good backing and everything hurrah, boys! He wants me to come back as leading lady, with twice the salary I had before, and a share in the profits besides. It's a big offer, Mr.; little Lila ought to be very thankful."

She could not look at the landlord. She knew how piteous the round blue eyes were. She could see, without looking, the quivering of his lips, as he tried to shape the sentence that would not come.

"You—you—you ain't goin', Mrs.?"

"Why, of course I'm going!" cried Lila Laughter. "We want to talk sensible about this, Mr. Little Lila's got her living to earn, same as you have. You keep a hotel, the dandiest hotel that ever was kept, and I play and sing in vaudeville. That's all straight, isn't it? It's back to the boards for Lila."

It seemed to her as if the silence that followed would never break. At last——

"Do you want to go?" asked Marshall Mallow.

Now it was Lila who could not break the silence. She looked slowly round the room, the cheerful, friendly, absurd room which had come to seem more like home to her than anything she had known in her life. She loved every tidy on every chair. She loved the ridiculous lambrequin on the mantelpiece, crocheted by Mr. Mallow's own fingers and adorned with dabs of colored wool, with knots of ribbon, with silk and worsted flowers. She loved the very andirons. Had it not been her chief amusement and comfort to polish them in those dreadful days when life and death played at dice together? She loved the Parian statuettes (though they were far from lovely) and the Rogers group on its stand. She even loved the crayon portraits of Father and Mother Mallow, which stared woodenly from the walls. Back to the boards, to paint and powder and wig, to clink and glitter and glare! Her eyes came back at last to the man who stood beside her, his round face, usually so rosy, now white and drawn, his blue eyes still fixed on her.

"Do I want to go?" she repeated. "That isn't the question, Mr. There's a good deal of have-to in this world, and I guess it's have-to now all right, all right!"

She tried for the octave, but it broke; tried for the trill, with no better success; broke at last into a faint whimper which could make no possible claim to be a laugh.

There was another silence. Then Billy, who had remained standing since he entered with the mail,

spoke two words of fate. He dug one elbow into the waistcoat of his friend and patron. With the other, he delicately nudged the lady.

"Get married!" he said, and left the room.

The man and woman stood, staring at each other. Mr. Mallow's lips tried several times to shape words, but without success. He gave something between a cough and a hiccough, but appeared incapable of anything else. It was Lila who broke the silence. She began to laugh, almost naturally this time, and spoke.

"Billy's a funny fellow! I don't know as I ever heard him say two words together before."

At the sound of her voice, life seemed to come back to the statue of Mr. Mallow. The blood flowed back into his round cheeks.

"He spoke sense!" he declared. "If ever I heard sense spoke, Billy spoke it. Let's get married!"

Lila laughed incredulously.

"Don't talk foolishness, Mr.!" she said. "You don't want no woman gormineering over you! I've heard you say it time and again."

"If I've been a condinged fool," said Marshall stoutly, "I ain't ashamed to own it. I have been, and I do own it. I never see a woman before that I'd say it to, but there's a time comes, I expect, to every one, and my time's come now. I ask you if you will be Mrs. Marshall Mallow."

He spoke not without dignity. Whatever there was absurd in the dear man seemed to fall away from him. Certainly, in Lila's eyes, he lacked nothing needed to make the full stature of a man. She looked at him, and her eyes were eloquent.

"And as for them buttons," Mr. Mallow went on,

"you no need to sew on a button so long as you live, Lila, unless you want to!"

"Oh, buttons!" cried Lila, and now tears and laughter came together, both hearty and simple as her own nature. "Dear man, what do you think I've been doing all this time? You won't find a button loose on anything in this house! Oh, Mr., you do the gormineering, and I'll sew on the buttons as long as I live, and ask no better!"

CHAPTER XXIII

A COMING-OUT PARTY

IN later days, Tim Tenterden was apt to refer to that tea party at the parsonage as one of the most disastrous occasions of his life; yet it was meant to be a pure pleasure for him and for everybody. He went to it on wings, every feather of either wing plumed for victory and rapture. He was to see her again. He had not seen her, save for that brief terrified glance at the gate when the only thing necessary in life was to get as far away from her as possible; had not seen her for two months, or two years, or two æons. He was to see her now in her own home, the dear pleasant place which was now almost a second home to him, the dear place from which he meant to remove her in the shortest possible space of time, to fill another home which should combine all the advantages of Utopia and Eldorado.

And they were all so glad to see him. They had told him this was to be his coming-out party, coming out of prison, out of the memory of plague and pestilence and everything dreadful. The parlor was in its best possible order; the prettiest dishes were brought out, those with the least nicks in them. The girls were in their prettiest dresses. Zephine looked charming in her blue muslin. *She* was in pink, and Tim was distracted with uncertainty as to whether she looked more like a rose, or sunset, or an angel blushing, or what. They received him with open arms, the minister beaming through his spectacles, his hair more

halo-like than ever. Mrs. Chanter—honestly, the most motherly person, except mother, Tim had ever seen in his life; Zephine as sisterly and gay as could be imagined, Aristides flushing with pleasure, alternately gruff and squeaking in a fervent incoherence of welcome: but his Lina, his rose, his sunset, his angel—what was the matter?

There was a warm hand clasp, a shy, kind glance from under the long dark lashes, and then— Tim racked his brain, bewildered. What had he done? What had he said? What hadn't he done that he should have? She was very kind. Heavens and earth, he didn't want her to be kind! That was the last thing he wanted of her. He wanted her to let him know by a look, a flutter, by the way she stood and moved, that she understood, and cared just a little; he didn't expect her to care much yet, but just a little. And here she sat and sewed, sewed as if for her life, steadily, quietly, firmly, little, tiny perfect stitches, her needle moving in and out with absolute regularity. Tim longed to snatch the work and throw it into the fireplace. He didn't see how he could possibly bear this kind of thing.

"Supper!" said Mrs. Chanter, cheerily. "I hope you have brought your appetite with you, Tim."

For once in his life, Tim hadn't. He didn't know what he was eating. He said, "Gee!" mechanically; said everything was "great," and "fine," using over and over again the two poor hard-worked adjectives which were all his generation possessed. He might have been eating sawdust griddle-cakes, instead of these delicate, gossamer brown things into which, had he but known it, Lina had put her very best effort;

but he tried, manfully, and they did not guess—after all, you could always eat!

Even after supper, in the once blessed dish-washing time, it was little better. Lina would not sing. She thought she had a cold coming on. The rest of them sing, please! She would love so to listen. So they sang the rounds and glees, and Tim supposed they were pretty, but he didn't seem to care. He appealed to her once or twice. Didn't she think this one was great? Couldn't she just sing a little? But no, of course not; not if she had a cold. He was a brute to think of it. She answered kindly—oh, but *kindly!*—her eyes bent on the plate she was polishing. An aura seemed to surround her, something cool, quiet, aloof, like a wall of glass. What was it? What had he done? What hadn't he done?

Back in the parlor, there must be more singing. He must sing! Oh, Zephine said, he must sing all the old things and the new ones, too; that is, he knew, the songs Lina hadn't heard. Oh, yes, she would play his accompaniments.

Now, now was his chance. Now, she would hear, would feel, would know, would understand, that there was nothing in the world for him but her. She would look up, would smile in the old way, and cease to be kind and cool and far off. So he sang; first "Shenandoah," and as he sang the second stanza, his eyes were fixed on her as though by sheer power of his love he could make her raise those downcast white rose leaves of her eyelids.

"Oh, Shenandoah, I love thy daughter!
Oho! the rolling river!"

No! not a glance! Watching her as he sang, he saw the blood ebb and flow in her clear cheek, now flooding it with its own damask, now leaving it white as marble; saw the long lashes tremble on the smooth, rounded cheek; but she did not look up.

"Oh, now," cried Zephine, "now sing the loveliest of all, your mother's song, Tim! Sing that for Lina!"

Tim gave her a grateful and appreciative glance. There had been no confidences between these two, but the free-masonry of youth had told Tim that Zephine knew all about it, and that she was his friend. And if Zephine knew, of course She knew; she must know, and if she would not look up, it meant that she did not care. It meant—perhaps—that there was some one else. He ran over in his mind the male population of Cyrus, and rejected it, with a breath of relief; ran over, too, the senior class of Corona College, members of which would now and again come over with Rodney, and enjoy only too noticeably the society of Rodney's sisters; splendid fellows, some of them, but still—she had not seemed—or there was that place out West, where she had been staying—fellows with everything, perhaps, that he lacked, money, education, poetry, fellows who had been through college——

Never mind! Tim's chin went up. They were there, and he was here, and he would make a good try for it anyhow.

So he sang, with his whole heart in it, one of the most exquisite and most unjustly forgotten of love songs, the song with which his father had wooed his mother, a quarter of a century ago.

"Deck not with gems that lovely form for me!
They in my eyes could add no charm to thee.
Braid not for me the tresses of thy hair!
I must have loved thee, hadst thou not been fair."

As the boy sang, his whole honest soul in every word, the friendly family fairly thrilled responsive. Mr. Chanter wiped his spectacles and blew his nose in silent emotion. He looked at his wife and saw the tears rolling down her cheeks, and met her glance, full of tender reminiscence. Zephine's eyes were shining, her hands clasped together. Sometime—sometime, somebody would be singing to her like that. Meantime, what was Lina made of, she would like to know? Even Aristides, at this time a professed scorner of the tender passion, changed color and moved uneasily in his seat, admitting to himself, that, gee, there might be something in it, if it made a fellow sing like that. But Lina looked down at her work, and when the song was finished, she murmured something about a spool and slipped quietly out of the room.

A dreadful evening! but at last it was over, and Tim could go away in the moonlight. His head was in a whirl, his heart was beating to suffocation from the cool pressure of that little hand at parting. Fortunately, the moon was bright and kind, and did something for him. He was able to assure the friendly luminary that nothing made any difference, nothing could, would, or should make any difference, unless there were some other fellow. If there were, of course he should go away. Mother would go with him. They could find another place. He couldn't stay here. Meanwhile, neither man nor boy, nor all that was at enmity with joy, should utterly abolish or destroy

(these were not his words, for Tim was at this time wholly unaware of Wordsworth)— At this moment, the passionate pilgrim, his eyes fixed on the moon, walked into a tree, bumped his forehead severely and made it bleed, and walked home in a chastened frame of mind.

. . . . . .

"Lina," said Zephine, "what made you behave so?"

"Behave how, darling?"

The girls were up in their room, making ready for bed. Lina was at the glass, brushing out her long dark hair. If Tim had seen her, he might have gone into even more violent raptures, for the dark hair fell about her like a cloak, and her rose-leaf face, a very white rose to-night, looked out from it like the moon from a cloud, or a lily from dark leaves, or anything else that a fond lover might burningly imagine. She was not clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, but in the simplest of little white dimity wrappers. The whole room was simple and bare, but a plain setting was better for a jewel, for the most wonderful jewel the world ever contained—I am not Timothy Tenterden, but my sympathy for him on this particular night is so great that I find myself constantly running into his frame of mind. In plain prose, Lina was brushing her hair. She did not turn round when her sister spoke.

"Behave how, darling?" she asked in a soft little voice.

"Lina, don't be exasperating! Here you've been away, and Tim has been shut up in prison and behaving like Bayard and Sidney, and all the heroes there ever were rolled into one, and you sit the whole eve-

ning like a dumb mouse, and never once look up from your sewing. I don't know what possesses you, Lina! I wish you'd tell me. It isn't like you a bit to act this way."

"Oh! Darling!" Lina's voice was softer than ever, with a little flurry in it that always came when she was moved. "Indeed, I didn't mean to be—to act in any way different from usual. But, Zeph dear, I want to tell you—of course, I was very glad to see Mr.—to see Tim back again, but I have something to tell you, darling; something that concerns myself, Zephine."

"Oh, indeed!" said Zephine, rather tartly. "Suppose you tell it then, and don't try to be a Sphinx, Lina. because you aren't built for it!"

"I wanted to tell you, dearest," Lina went on, still in that soft voice, "that I am going to be a deaconess."

"You're going to be a *what?*" cried Zephine, pausing with uplifted brush.

"A deaconess, dear. I have been thinking of it for —for some time, Zephine. You see, taking the nursing course made me see how much misery there is in this wicked world, and—and of course I have always gone round with dear father, you know, and then this last year with Dr. Pettijohn, and—all one's life isn't enough to give to help those who need help, and so, dear, I have decided to be a deaconess, and to—and to cast all my cares on the Lord, Zeph darling, and not to think about worldly pleasures, like singing and all that sort of thing; but, oh, Zeph darling, you know my heart is yours always! You know how happy I shall be, dear, to see you happy!"

She turned at last, with a lovely look of tenderness, but Zephine only stared back with round blue eyes.

"What are you talking about, Lina Chanter?" she said. "Be a deaconess? You?"

"Yes, dear, yes. You know they have one at Tinkham."

"Hmpf! They need one at Tinkham! We don't need one here in Cyrus. I never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life!" cried Zephine. "What does father say to all this? What does mother say? Lina, I think you are going out of your mind!"

"Oh, oh, no, dear. It is my mind that is going into it. I haven't spoken to dear father yet. I am going to, to-morrow. I am going to tell him all about it. And now I think we will not talk any more. It is time we were in bed. Good night, darling Zeph."

"Lina," said Zephine, "you are not going to bed. You are going to listen to me."

Oh, these quiet people! How exasperating they were! Lina was already on her knees by the side of the bed, and Zephine knew well from experience that she might stay there a wholly indefinite time. With a muttered exclamation of annoyance, Zephine plumped down on her own knees, and after a brief petition which can hardly, I fear, have been as fervent as might have been wished, flounced into bed, and buried her little nose in the pillow.

"It's all right to be good," said Zephine to herself, "but deliver me from pernickety piety!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MINISTER'S SATURDAY

TIM'S "coming out" party was on a Friday. The next day was a harried one for the minister. To begin with, his Susan had been called away by telegram to the bedside of a sick aunt. This in itself was bad enough. Susan always said she never could or would go away on a Saturday, because if she did go, Satan was sure to step in and harry her Timothy. This time, however, there was no help for it. Gone she was, and it certainly did seem as if Satan, or one of his emissaries, were taking a hand.

The minister wished to take special pains with this Sunday's sermon. He had been thinking about it all the week. He felt that his dear people, so excellent in so many various ways, still left a little to be desired in spiritual matters. The things of the spirit; these were what he wished to bring home to them. He had made a good start on Friday. He had cheerfully assured his Sue that he had got the thread, got the thread; that was really all that was necessary; he was quite sure everything would be all right. And then—the locusts came, one at a time like those in the story book, first at the front door, then at the back door, a steady stream of them all through his precious morning. It was a little sad, the minister thought, that so many people felt the need of having their souls tinkered before the Sabbath. It was a little too like

brushing their hats and coats. Tinkering: that was the word. What strange receptacles, he thought, sometimes contained the spirit; what odd jugs, pipkins, saucepans— He brought himself up with a start. This was not the way to write his sermon. But——

First, it was Abram Hanks wishing to consult him as to whether it would be wiser for him to pay court to the Widow Sharpe or her daughter Cecilia. Abram was getting on in years, he told Mr. Chanter; he missed Serena, he really did; he had never thought he'd miss her so much: but he felt the need of some one to take a-holt. Now here was these two. Sophia wa'n't young, but she was smart and savin', and more what he'd call his own time o' life and way o' thinkin'. Cissy was better lookin' and of course she'd last longer, last his time and over; but there! he didn't hardly know which to ask. What would Mr. Chanter advise?

Mr. Chanter, turning away resolutely from the things of the spirit, surveyed his dingy little interlocutor and asked which of them would be more likely to accept him.

"If I were you," he said, "I should be guided somewhat by that, Mr. Hanks."

"I expect either one of them is wishful," said Abram, with modest complacency, turning his greenish brown felt hat round and round in his hands. "They're lone women, you see; that is to say, the two of them is together, but they have no menfolks belonging to them; and then a widower, you see, is more acceptable, 'pears though, than what a single man is, most times. He's been there, you see, and knows the ropes."

"But which do you like best?" said poor Mr. Chanter, rumpling up his hair.

"Well, there's a good deal to be said on both sides. They ain't either of 'em what you'd call real agreeable, but they're smart, that's what I look at, smart and savin', and—er—I've got one deef ear, you know. I don't need to hear 'em talk, unless I'm a mind to. And I don't doubt but what either of 'em would be as lovin' as I should require."

The minister had hardly got rid of this visitor—he refused positively to make his choice for him—when Mrs. Sharpe herself appeared, full of information which she was lawth to impart, but which she felt it her Christian duty to lay before her minister. It was bad enough to have such things going in what used to be a Christian community; but he being so took up with spiritual matters, or *some* kind of matters, said Mrs. Sharpe, 'twas the duty of his parish to let him know that *their* eyes were open and that they didn't wear blinkers, let those do so who would.

At this, Mr. Chanter gathered his forces, took a firm hold on the green cord and tassel of his army dressing gown, and resolutely told Mrs. Sharpe that he could not listen to any such things.

"I am busy, Mrs. Sharpe!" he said. "It is the day before the Sabbath. I recommend you to occupy your thoughts with things of the spirit, instead of dwelling upon the shortcomings of your neighbors. I bid you good morning."

As the door closed on Mrs. Sharpe's last sputtering protest, the minister heaved a sigh of mingled relief and self-condemnation. Sue would approve, he knew;

he *had* to write his sermon. There was no reason why Mrs. Sharpe should bring complaints to him on Saturday, or indeed on any other day. She was a troublesome woman, though doubtless she had the good of the community at heart. His thoughts reverted to the question of receptacles; he wondered what kind of knobby, brassy pitcher might be supposed to hold Mrs. Sharpe's spiritual part, what rusty leathern jack, or what not, would best fit the soul of Abram Hanks. Then he laughed a little patient laugh, and said, come, come, come, this wouldn't buy the child a cake. He must get back to his work. Things of the spirit! Things of the spirit! What did it matter whether earthly prosperity were ours or whether——

Splash! a drop descended on his paper.

He looked up and saw that the leak in the ceiling had spread. Raining? So it was! a passing shower, nothing more! He placed an ash tray so that it would catch the drops, moved his chair and paper to one side, and continued his work.

So it went on all through the morning. It would not have been so had Sue been at home. She was a most faithful dragon, his Sue. What did people do who had married other kinds of wives? He thought of his brother pastor in Tinkham, and shivered a little, hearing the strident tones of that gentleman's helpmate admonishing her husband not to bring that nasty pipe into the sitting room, if he pleased. The dear girls did their best, he knew. Unfortunate that this should be Lina's morning with Dr. Pettijohn. Zephine was busy in the kitchen, of course. Dear girls! how hard they worked! How good they were! was anybody ever so blessed in his children?

He made a little progress before dinner, enjoyed and praised Zephine's stew and apple pudding, and had just settled down to his work comfortably again, pipe in mouth, when the bombshell exploded.

Lina came in, in her quiet way, and shut the door after her. She was sorry to disturb him, but might she say just a word?

"Dear father, I know it is your busy time, and I am so sorry, but I think I have to tell you before Sunday that I have decided to be a deaconess."

"Decided to be a what?" said Mr. Chanter, as her sister had said the night before.

"To be a deaconess, dear. I do hope you will approve!"

She poured out her little story hurriedly, the color coming and going in her cheeks, her little hands clasping and unclasping nervously as she spoke. She had been thinking of this for some time, but while she was out with Mary it came to her very clearly that the path of duty lay there. She had met a deaconess there, such a charming person, not much older than herself, and oh! doing such wonders, father dear! And of course Cyrus was a small place, but oh, there *was* need of help, spiritual as well as bodily; he had said so only the other day, didn't he remember? And of course having studied nursing would be a help, and going about with him of course the greatest help of all, because she had seen all that he accomplished and longed so, dear father, to help a little more intelligently, didn't he see? And going about the rounds with Dr. Pettijohn had helped, too, a great deal. She felt she knew ever so much more than she did a year ago, and though she could never hope to accomplish

very much, still she would try, dear father, she would try her utmost.

Here were things of the spirit, indeed. Mr. Chanter rumpled his hair in a very anguish of amazement and perplexity.

"My dear child! My dear child!" he said. "Why do you spring this upon me so suddenly? What does your mother say to this?"

Lina had not told dear mother. She had thought she ought to speak to him first. "You are my pastor, you see, darling," she said, "as well as my dearest father."

"I don't understand it!" said Mr. Chanter almost irritably. "I don't understand it. Why, my child, there is no need of your becoming a deaconess. You are doing the work already. You have been doing it ever since you grew up. I don't believe your mother would approve of this at all."

Oh, Lina hoped that would not be so. She hoped dear mother would approve; but if she felt it to be her duty, if she felt it to be a call, why, then, she knew that dear mother would be the last to oppose it. There was another thing, she said, her voice softer and more hurried than ever. "You see, dear father, this wouldn't take me away from home as going into a sisterhood would. I can stay here at home, and when Zephine is married——"

"Zephine? Married?" interjected the distracted father. "Zephine isn't going to be married!"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes, dear father, I think she will be married very soon. I think she and Tim have—have been attracted by each other, perhaps for a long time. I didn't realize until I came home, but I have seen it

very clearly since, and have thought how dull I was ever to have imagined—anything else. So you see, dear father, when Zephine is married, I shall always be at home and never, never have to leave you and dearest mother."

Mr. Chanter drummed on the table, a habit he detested. He got up and drummed on the window. Then he sat down again, and a drop fell directly on his head.

"Where is that basin?" he said fretfully. "Can't you get the basin, Lina? The best vow for any one in this house to make is a vow to get that roof mended!"

Lina brought the basin and sat down with folded hands, as pretty a little image of mute and patient obstinacy as could well be imagined.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Mr. Chanter.

"For your answer, father dear!" said Lina, "for your blessing, dearest father, on my new work."

"I cannot have this!" Mr. Chanter broke out. "My dear child, I—I appreciate your feelings and your devotion; you know I do, you know I do, dear child; but I cannot have such a question as this decided all in a minute, and in your mother's absence, and on a Saturday, too."

In all his distraction, an illuminating flash showed him how wholly upset the child's judgment must be. She had never in her life before disturbed him even for five minutes on a Saturday.

"I cannot. Your own good sense will tell you that," he went on. "You must take a week to think it over."

"I have been thinking it over for two months, father dear."

"But I haven't! It has come upon me like a thunderbolt, and I confess that at first blush I don't like the idea at all. You must take a week, and give me a week, you really must, Lina dear. That is my last word. And now," he added, "do, darling, do run away and let me finish my poor sermon. I have been interrupted all day long. It always happens this way when your mother goes away. I wish people could be ill in the middle of the week. Good-by, darling. Don't think I am vexed! I am only a little put about."

Lina kissed him, murmuring little soft words of penitence. She was so sorry. Of course she would wait a week. Not that it would make any difference, but of course she would wait a week. She slipped away and left the minister clutching his hair and looking at the paper before him. Things of the spirit! Was it a thing of the spirit that would take Lina out of the family life? What would become of them without Lina? Sue worked far too hard as it was.

This time the drop fell directly into his pipe, which went out with a splutter. The minister groaned. It was no use. His mind was hopelessly disturbed. He must finish the sermon this evening. He got up and went for a walk, made a call at Gaylord's to see about the christening of the twins,—it was to be a great affair, with the presentation of a solid silver font " by their fondly grateful mamma, Mrs. Emmeline Tooth"; only of course that would have to be altered, Mr. Chanter thought,—and came back feeling more like himself. It was a lovely evening. The moon was rising. Sue would be back on Monday. He must be cheerful for the dear children.

He was cheerful, and had a delightful hour with

them after supper; then told them resolutely that he was not to be disturbed on any account, dears,—except for a case of distress, he added hastily—went into his study again and shut the door firmly.

The things of the spirit! Lina, Sue, Mrs. Tooth.

A step sounded on the gravel, a light, firm, quick tread that he thought he knew.

"Oh, bless my soul!" said the minister. "It's Tim Tenterden! I can't see him."

But when he opened the door in answer to a low knock, it was only to make a gesture of welcome. "Come in!" he said. "Come in. What is it? No trouble? No trouble, I trust?"

"I hope not, sir."

Tim's voice was a little tremulous. He shut the door after him, and in response to the minister's gesture sat down in the very chair that Lina had occupied a few hours before.

"I just felt I had to come, Mr. Chanter. I had to speak to you. After last night——"

"Last night?" repeated Mr. Chanter, as the young man paused. "What have you done to your forehead, my dear boy?"

"Oh, it's nothing;" said Tim. "I met a tree! It's nothing at all. I was afraid—I was afraid I might have seemed strange, Mr. Chanter.

Mr. Chanter reflected. "No," he said. "I am not aware that you appeared strange, Timothy. You sang very delightfully. We all enjoyed it extremely. No, my dear fellow, I think there was nothing strange. But you look strange now, Timothy!" he added. "I do hope there is no trouble at home, my dear boy?"

"Oh, no, there is no trouble at home!" said Tim.

"I have brought all the trouble with me. It's all here, sir!"

He indicated the region where his heart had been, when it was his own; where something now throbbed and burned and agonized in its place. He paused, then broke out again.

"You know all about women, Mr. Chanter!"

At this monstrous statement, the pastor raised his mild blue eyes. This had been indeed what Sue called a Satanic Saturday. He had been harried literally from the moment of Sue's departure till this closing hour of the day; and now to be told that he knew all about women——!

"You don't know what you are saying, my son!" he said gravely. "No one knows all about women, except their Maker. Tell me—" he glanced at his sermon—"as briefly as you can, what is it that troubles you."

"I'll try!" said Tim. "I'm sorry, sir!" for his quick eyes had noted the glance at the paper. "I'll cut it as short as I can."

He wanted to know what he had done to offend Miss Lina. She was so changed, so different to him. He didn't think he could go on this way any longer.

"What makes you think you have done anything to offend Lina?" asked the unhappy pastor.

"She hardly spoke to me last night!" said Tim. "She didn't look at me once all the evening. I sang to her— Oh, all the rest of you knew I was singing to her!" cried poor Tim. "And she wouldn't know, or wouldn't listen, or wouldn't care. What shall I do, Mr. Chanter?"

"God bless my soul!" said the minister. "You were

singing to her, were you? Well, I thought, somehow, that you were singing to her. I think you'll have to tell me what it all means, my dear boy."

"I don't know what it all means!" said the dear boy. "I only know that I have loved your daughter Lina, Mr. Chanter, almost ever since I first set eyes on her, certainly since the second time I saw her. Before she went away, for a little time—for a little while—I thought she knew it—I thought she realized it, sir. I thought she was beginning—oh, I don't mean to care for me in the way I care for her, because of course nobody ever could do that—but I did think she liked me. I thought with time, Mr. Chanter, and doing the very best there was in me to do, I might with your consent and Mrs. Chanter's—you've always been so kind and good to me—I might perhaps win her. And now she's come back, and everything is different. She won't look at me, she won't speak to me."

Mr. Chanter rose, his hair standing on end to an extent that would have frightened his Susan.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed again. "Tim, my dear boy, I am deeply touched by what you say. A few hours ago, it would have given me great pleasure, very great pleasure. But now, now, Tim——"

He rumpled his hair again, and being unable to pace the room, turned round and round where he stood.

"My dear boy, if you want to marry Lina, then what the—what the—what the—*why* does she want to be a deaconess?"

Timothy Tenterden turned white and clutched the back of the chair from which he had risen.

"Be a deaconess?" he repeated. "What—what—what do you mean, Mr. Chanter?"

Mr. Chanter never said what he meant. At that moment a sound broke upon their ears, the sound of a voice singing in the garden, Zephine's voice, thin but sweet.

"My true love hath my heart, and I have his,
By just exchange, one for another given.
I hold his dear, and mine he cannot miss,
There never was a better bargain driven."

Then, as the little clear voice trilled on to the next part, another voice took up the first strain, a contralto, soft, rich, like flowing velvet.

"My true love hath my heart——"

Tim Tenterden threw his head back.

"By George!" he said. "I'll see if he has! Excuse me, sir!" And he ran out of the room.

Lina had not sung at home since she came back, had refused to sing except in church, and there always the little cold aura, the crystal screen, had been between her and every one else. But Zephine had had enough of this kind of thing. She loved to sing with Lina; they had always sung together. She wanted to sing now, this evening, this minute, when the shower had passed and the moon was out, and all the world was crystal and silver.

"Come out into the garden, Lina!" she called. "Come out! I want to show you something."

Lina, all flushed from bending over the stove, came out, rather unwillingly.

"What is it, darling?" she said. "Don't keep me, dear! I have to set my bread."

"You have to look at the moon!" said Zephine. "You have to look at the moon and sing with me. Lina, you haven't sung since you came back, little frog! Look at the moon! You know I always go wild on a night like this."

"Oh, no, Zeph dear!" pleaded Lina. "I don't feel like singing. Do let me go back to my bread!"

"If you don't sing with me, I shall scream! Father's got somebody in the study, and if I scream, they'll come rushing out, thinking I have got a fit. I *will* have a fit, too, if you don't look out! I know just how to do it. Lina Chanter, I'll scare you out of your senses, if you don't sing with me. Come, little frog—" She wound her arms round her sister's neck. "Come sing with me, little cold froggy!"

When Zephine coaxed, there was no resistance in Lina.

"I will, darling!" she said. "Just once through: start it."

Zephine started, Lina followed suit. The sisters stood with arms intertwined, looking up at the moon through the branches of the great elm that leaned lovingly over them. It was a pretty sight, the moon may have thought. She looks on many brooks, we know, but she never looked on anything prettier than Lina and Zephine with twined arms and uplifted faces. Lina's voice was not quite natural. It was a little strained, a little sad, but always delicious.

"My true love hath my heart, and I, and I have his——"

What is this? Some one comes hurrying down

the path behind them. Zephine turns first, gives a little crow, half laughing, half crying, and vanishes. And now, another arm is round Lina's waist, another voice thrills in her ears, the golden tenor which has had power to shake her heart from the first hearing of it.

"By just exchange, one for another given!"

"Oh, Lina! Lina! Lina!—it isn't her song! It's my song, yours and mine, my darling! my darling! There never was a better bargain driven!"

"Oh, Tim!" said Lina. "Oh, Tim! I thought——"

But in her Tim's arms, her head on his faithful breast, it did not seem to matter what Lina had thought. . . .

Was it ten minutes later? Half an hour? An hour? How should they know? What room was there in their world, just then, for a man in an army dressing gown, rumpling his gray halo and repeating over and over the little prayers which were almost like breathing to him?

"Lord, give me patience! Lord, help me to be cheerful! Lord, teach me to forget self in the thought of others!"

Two radiant, scarce-embodied spirits, treading on air, breathing some subtle, radiant ether far lighter than air, flitted along the gravel path and up the steps into the minister's study.

"Oh, sir," cried Tim, "it's all right! She *is* my Lina. There was never anything really the matter. It's all right, and I'm the happiest fellow in the wide

world! Won't you give us your blessing, Mr. Chanter?"

"God bless my soul!" said the Reverend Timothy Chanter.

But he had to read a sermon of Robertson's the next day.

THE END